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A

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BY

VICTOR CHERBULIEZ.



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APPLETONS' NEW HANDY-VOLUME SERIES. 49

A

STROKE OF DIPLOMACY.

FROM THE FRENCH OF

VICTOR CHERBULIEZ,

AUTHOR OF

"SAMUEL BROHL AND COMPANY," "JEAN TETEROL'S IDEA," ETC.



NEW YORK:

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A STROKE OF DIPLOMACY.*

I.

ONE evening, at his return from dining at his club, the Marquis de Miraval found at home a letter from his niece, Madame de Penneville, who wrote to him from Vichy, thus :

“MY DEAR UNCLE : The waters here have done me a great deal of good. Until to-day I had every reason to be entirely satisfied with my cure ; but I am afraid the good result which I expected will be undone by a disagreeable bit of news which I have just received, and which causes me more trouble and annoyance than I can well express to you. The physicians insist that the first thing necessary for those who suffer from chronic liver-trouble is to take no care upon themselves. I do not take it upon myself, but others give me enough. My mind is tormented with the

* The original title in the French of this story is “Le Roi Apépi.”

thought of a certain Madame Corneuil, for that is the woman's name. I never heard of her, but I detest her without knowing her. You have seen a great deal of the world, and are somewhat inquisitive. I am convinced, my dear uncle, that you know all about her. Write me at once who Madame Corneuil may be. It is a serious question to me. I will explain to you some time why it is so."

The Marquis de Miraval was an old diplomate, who began his career under Louis Philippe, and had likewise filled honorably, under the empire, several second-rate positions, which satisfied his ambition. When thrust aside by the revolution of September 4th, he bore it philosophically. He had no trouble with his liver, as had his niece. Neither that nor his spleen ever disturbed him in the least. He was in excellent health, his stomach seemed like iron, his gait was still firm, his sight clear, and he had an income of two hundred thousand livres, which is injurious to no one. As he always looked at the bright side of things, he congratulated himself upon having reached the age of sixty-five without losing his hair, which was literally white as snow ; but he never thought of dyeing it. As his mind and character were well balanced, he believed that Nature understands the fitness of things, and knows better than we what best becomes us ; that, after all, she

is a kind mistress, and, at all events, an all-powerful one ; that it is useless to oppose her, and absurd to dispute with her, when, after all, every age has its own pleasures, and, having had a fair experience of life, good and bad, it is not disagreeable to pass ten years or so in watching how others live, laughing to one's self at their follies, and thinking, "I am past committing them, but can comprehend them all."

As he bore no grudge to age for whitening his abundant chestnut locks, of which he used to be rather vain, so the Marquis easily forgave the revolutions which so prematurely closed his career. One has a right to rail against his judge for twenty-four hours, so, after relieving his anger by a few well-directed epigrams, Monsieur de Miraval soon consoled himself for those events which condemned him to be of no importance in affairs of state, but which restored him his independence by way of compensation. Liberty had always seemed to him the most precious of all possessions ; he considered that man happy who was responsible only to himself, and could order his life as he chose. For that reason he decided to remain a widower, after having been married two years. He was urged to marry again in vain, and answered in the words of a celebrated painter, "Would it be so delightful, then, in going home to find a stranger there?" He was always well received by women at their own houses, but never

thought of them seriously, being somewhat skeptical in his real opinion of them. The Marquis de Miraval was a wise man ; some called him an egotist, a distinction not always easily made.

Whether sage or egotist, the Marquis de Miraval had sincere affection for his niece, the Countess of Penneville, and he considered it his duty to reply to her by return of mail. Those who have diseased livers should not be kept waiting. His answer ran in these words :

“ MY DEAR MATHILDE : I regret infinitely that your cure should be retarded by care and worryment. They are the worst of all diseases, although they kill no one. But what is the matter, and what has Madame Corneuil to do with it ? What can there be between this woman, whom you do not know, and the Countess of Penneville ? I ask for a prompt explanation. In waiting for that, since you desire it, I will tell you, as best I can, who Madame Corneuil is—whom, however, I have never seen ; but I know well those who do know her.

“ Can it be possible, dear Mathilde, that you have never heard of Madame de Corneuil before now ? I am sorry ; it proves you are no literary woman ; in fact, you must be a woman who actually never reads not even the ‘ Gazette des Tribunaux.’ Do not fancy from this sentence that Madame Corneuil is either a poisoner or a re-

ceiver of stolen goods, or that she has ever even appeared before the Court of Assizes ; but some seven or eight years ago she separated from Monsieur de Corneuil, and the affair created considerable talk. Here is the whole story, as well as I can remember it :

“Monsieur de Corneuil was formerly Consul-General from France to Alexandria. He was considered a good agent, whose only fault was that his manner was rather brusque. That is a slight failing. In the country of the ‘Coubache,’ one must know how to be brusque with both men and things. When an Oriental is not of your opinion, and sets too high a price upon his own, the only way to convince him is to strangle him ; but this has nothing to do with my subject. A chance, fortunate for some and unfortunate for others, sent one Monsieur Véretz to land on the quays of Alexandria. He was a small business agent of Paris, who, not succeeding there, and to escape from his creditors, came as fast as his legs could bring him to seek his fortune in the land of the Pharaohs. He was, it seems, very little of a man, of doubtful morality, and of more than equivocal reputation. Monsieur Véretz had a daughter, eighteen years old, who was bewitchingly pretty. How and where Monsieur Corneuil made her acquaintance, the chronicle does not say ; it tells us merely that this bear was very susceptible, and was determined to pursue his own fancies. From

the first meeting with this beautiful child he fell desperately in love with her. Fortunately for Mademoiselle Hortense Véretz, her mother was an excellent manager—a most fortunate thing for a daughter. After a few weeks of vain endeavor, Monsieur de Corneuil was determined to overcome all obstacles. The Consul-General, who had a large fortune, persisted in marrying, for the sake of her beautiful eyes, a girl who had nothing, and whose father bore a blemished name; still more, he married her without any contract at all, thereby giving her an equal share in his property. The matter caused great scandal. People flung his father-in-law at him, and openly brought insinuations against himself as well, so that he was at last obliged to give in his resignation, and left Egypt to return to Périgueux, his native town, in which step his beautiful young wife encouraged him, for she longed to break away for ever from a father who so compromised her, and also that she might enjoy her new fortune in France. I remember hearing the whole story at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where they talked of it for a week, and then they talked of something else. But the ex-Consul was not over his troubles. Four years later, Madame Corneuil demanded a separation. Her mother had accompanied her to Périgueux: when one is fortunate enough to have a manœuvring mother, it is best never to part with her, and to be governed always by her counsel.

“Why did Madame de Corneuil separate from her husband? You must ask the lawyers. They were admirable on either side, and used all the resources of their loquacity. Both pleas, where epigrams alternated with apostrophes, and apostrophes with invectives, were specimens of that elevated taste which delights the malice of the public.

“The details escape me. I have not the ‘Gazette des Tribunaux’ at hand, but it does not matter—I am sure of my facts. Papin, the lawyer for the plaintiff, one of the first at the bar, protested that Monsieur Corneuil was an ugly fellow, a downright blockhead; that Madame Corneuil was of a most exquisite nature, an angelic character; that this monster at first loved this angel to distraction, but soon tired of her, and abused her in every way—to all of which Virion, the lawyer for the defense, insisted that, if his client had occasionally been somewhat hasty in his manner toward her, he was no monster, and that in the sweet heart of this angel there was considerable vinegar and a great deal of calculation. He tried to prove to the court that there was every excuse for the behavior of Monsieur Corneuil, but that his wife looked upon his determination to live in Périgueux as a crime, for she could not endure the place; and, since she could not persuade him to change their abode to Paris, which she considered the only spot

worthy of her grace and her genius, she had determined to lay a plan to regain her independence, and for that end had applied herself with Machiavellian ingenuity to aggravate him ; that she had made his home unbearable by the sharpness of her wit, by every kind of petty persecution, by all those little pin-prickings of which angels alone have the secret, and which drive to distraction even men who are not monsters ! Was the unfortunate man to blame for now and then asserting himself ? I assure you again that both lawyers did wonderfully well. The great difficulty was to know which was the liar. For myself, I should have dismissed both. However, the court sided with Papin. The separation was granted, and half the fortune adjudged to Madame Corneuil. It seemed, however, that Virion was not entirely wrong, for six months after the verdict Madame Corneuil left for Paris in company with her mother.

“I know beforehand, my dear Mathilde, that you will ask me what became of the beautiful Madame Corneuil in Paris. I have been out three times this morning for the sole end of finding out—you need not thank me, for I like it. Madame de Corneuil has not yet satisfied her secret ambition ; she can not yet say, ‘I have reached it !’ but she is fairly on her way thither. The butterfly has not entirely cast aside the chrysalis ; but she is patient, and one day will

spread her wings and fly in triumph from her sheath. Madame Corneuil gives receptions and dinner-parties, and holds a *salon*. A beautiful woman, with a manœuvring mother and a good cook, need not fear being left to pine in solitude. Formerly there were to be seen at her house a great many literary men, especially those of the new school—the young men. Great good may it do them ! There are among them men of talent with a future before them, but there are also among them those whose novelties are not new, and whose youth is somewhat rank ; but that is no business of mine. It does not prevent them from dining at Madame Corneuil's. She is not merely contented with encouraging literature, she also manufactures it, and employs the young men around her to write little scraps for the lesser journals in praise of her. Grateful stomachs make most excellent heralds, and at all events she is rich enough to pay for her own fame.

“Eighteen months after her establishment in Paris she published a romance, which by the merest of all accidents fell into my hands. I confess I did not read it through to the end ; every variety of courage can not be looked for in one individual. It began with the description of a *mist*. At the end of ten pages—Heaven be praised !—the fog lifted, and a woman in a *calèche* was visible. I remember that the *calèche* was bought of Binder ; I remember also that the woman, whose

heart was an abyss, wore six and one-quarter gloves, that she had three freckles on her right temple—just so many, and no more—‘quivering nostrils, arms inimitably rounded, and breathless silences.’ I do not know if we are of the same opinion, but descriptions appall me, and I rush away. Besides, my mind is so poorly constructed that I can not see this woman with whose description the author has taken so great pains. Good Homer, who does not belong to the new school, was satisfied to tell me merely that Achilles was fair, and yet I can see him before me. But what is to be done? It is the fashion of our day; they call it studying—what is the word?—studying the human documents, and it seems no one ever thought of that till now, not even my old friend Fielding, whom I reread every year. I am not very fond of even serious pedants, but I have a holy horror of pedantry when applied to the merest trifles. As I am no longer young, I agree with Voltaire, who did not like those subjects seriously discussed which were not worth being lightly touched upon. The romance of Madame Corneuil, I regret to say, fell flat. She strove to recover herself by poetry, and published a volume of sonnets, in which there was no allusion whatever to Monsieur Corneuil. The verses were written with rapid pen, but a pen sharpened by an angel, and full of the most exquisitely sweet and refined sentiment. As a general rule, the sonnets

of wives separated from their husbands are always sublime. Unfortunately, there is not a great call for the sublime. It was a cruel disappointment to Madame Corneuil, who suddenly broke with her Muse.

“All great artists, Mozart as well as Talleyrand, Raphael as well as Bismarck, have their different phases. Madame Corneuil thought she had better change hers : she reformed the whole style of her house, her cooking, her furniture, and her dress. She turned to serious things, and suddenly assumed a taste for neutral tints and sober conversations, for metaphysics and *feuille-morte* ribbons. This beautiful blonde discovered that she did not show her right value, except in being relieved to half-tint against the background of a room full of grave people. She undertook to weed out her company, and gently closed her doors on nearly all those insignificant fellows, at least upon the noisiest ones, who hover about the green-rooms and tell coarse stories. She grew disgusted with gossip, and found that respect was more desirable, even at the price of a little *ennui*. She endeavored, henceforth, to draw around her men of position and women of high character. It was difficult, but, with some pains and a great deal of perseverance, an ambitious woman who can stand being bored can accomplish anything. She wrote no more sonnets nor romances, but rushed at full might into works of charity.

“Charity, my dear Mathilde, is at the same time, and according to circumstances, the most beautiful of all the virtues or the most useful occupation. You have your poor, and God alone can tell how much you love them, how you care for them and cherish them ; but your left hand knows naught of what your right hand doeth. I do not know if Madame de Corneuil has often seen the poor ; but, instead of that, she goes and comes, and agitates and schemes, and preaches. She is on six committees and twelve sub-committees ; she is an incomparable beggar, a very expert cashier, an experienced treasurer, and accomplished vice-president. Yes, my dear, they say no one can preside better than she. It is the very best way to push one’s self into society. I must add that, although she composes poetry no longer, she has not given up prose. She has written an eloquent treatise on ‘The Apostleship of Woman,’ which is sold for the benefit of a new hospital, and which has reached its fifth edition. The sonnets were sublime, but the treatise is more than sublime. It is a mixture of the tenderness of Saint François de Sales and the spirituality of Saint Theresa. Never has the sugar-plum been held so high out of the reach of our poor humanity—it is not even in the air which we can breathe, but in pure ether. I am curious to know what Monsieur Corneuil and Périgueux think of it. The young fellow who furnished me with all these details spoke in rather a

satirical manner ; I asked him why, and he continued : ‘That really few knew her well. My opinion,’ he said, ‘is that she is a cool, calculating woman ; that she is determined to have a position, and to satisfy her ambition by fair means or foul. She aspires to become a leader, to have a hand in politics, and her dream is to marry some great name, or else a deputy.’ The young fellow said all this with a little bitterness. I learned that for nearly a year he has neither dined nor put his foot in the house of Madame Corneuil. Montesquieu used to say, ‘Father Tournemine and I have quarreled, so you must believe neither when we talk of one another.’ So I only believe half of what the young man says.

“This is all the information I can give you, my dear Mathilde ; tell me what you want of it ? Your old uncle embraces you tenderly.

“P. S.—I open my letter to say that as I was going to put my letter in the box on my way to dinner, by the grace of Heaven I met the lawyer Papin at the corner of the Rue Choiseul. It was his eloquence that gained the case for the amiable lady whom you seem to have taken a grudge against, no one knows why. I asked him for still further information. Madame de Corneuil has changed her style again, and I begin to think she changes too often. I am afraid she has not that concentrated mind or that persistence which is

necessary for great enterprises. I have my doubts of those impulsive creatures who go by fits and starts. At my very first words, Papin bridled up and straightened himself, after the manner of lawyers, as if he bore the weight of the universe on his shoulders, and broadened them lest it should fall. As if he were apostrophizing a judge, he exclaimed: 'Monsieur le Marquis, that woman is simply a marvel of Christian virtue. She heard eighteen months ago that her husband had a dangerous attack of the lungs. What did she do? Forgetting her own wrongs and her justifiable resentment, she rushed to him in Périgueux, and has become reconciled to him. Monsieur Corneuil was advised to go to Egypt; she left everything to accompany him, to become the nurse of a brute whose harshness had endangered her own life. Was I not right in affirming to the court that Madame de Corneuil was an angel?' 'There is no need of getting excited,' said I to him; 'I admire her fine character as well as you, but might it not be that, after having obtained, thanks to you, half of the fortune, this angel proposes to secure the other half as her inheritance?'

"He made a gesture of indignation, straightened himself again—'Ah! Monsieur le Marquis,' answered he, 'you never believed in women; you are a horrible skeptic.' I looked at him, he looked at me; I laughed, and he began to laugh. I think we must have resembled the augurs of Cicero.

“The good of it all, my dear Mathilde, is that you have no further need of explaining yourself to me. Listen to me. This is just what has happened : Your son Horace, an Egyptologist of great promise, who does me the honor of being my great-nephew, has been in Egypt for two years. There he has met a lovely blonde, and for the first time his heart has spoken ; he could not keep from writing you about it, hence his letters are filled with Madame Corneuil, and your maternal anxiety is aroused. Am I not right ? For shame ! you are ungrateful toward Providence. You have a thousand times reproached your son for being too sober, too serious, too much given to study ; scorning society, women, gayety, and business ; cherishing no other dream but that of some day composing a large book which will reveal to the astonished universe the ancient secrets of four thousand years. You flattered yourself that you might see him either in the Chamber of Deputies, the Council of State, or in diplomacy : his refusal made you wretched. From his most tender infancy he cried to be taken to the Egyptian Museum at the Louvre, and could have told with his eyes closed what was in the Cabinet K, and the Case Q, in the room of sacred antiquities. It is no fault of mine. I did not make him. This truly extraordinary youth never loved any one but the goddess Isis, wife of Osiris. He was never interested in any events but such as took place under

Sesostris the Great. The most heated discussions of our deputies and the most eloquent words they might utter always seemed tame to him in comparison with the story of the Pharaohs. He liked, better than all the amusements you might offer to him, a papyrus mounted on linen or pasteboard, a mummy's mask, a hawk, symbol of the soul, or a pretty *scarabæus* of gold, emblem of immortality. I speak knowingly, for he honored me with his confidence. The last time I saw him I shall long remember : I found him shut up with hieroglyphic writing arranged backward in columns, and ornamented with drawings of faces. He seemed much annoyed at being interrupted in this enchanting *tête-à-tête*. At the head of the manuscript was a man with a yellow face, hair painted blue, and his forehead ornamented with a lotus-bud and a great white cone. I touched one of the columns and said to the dear child, 'Great decipherer, what can all this conundrum be?' He answered, without being offended : 'My dear uncle, this conundrum, which, by your leave, is very plain, is of the greatest importance, and signifies that the keeper of the flocks of Ammon, Amen-Heb, the ever-truthful, and his wife, who loves him, Amen-Apt, the ever-truthful, render homage to Osiris, dwelling in the land of the West, ruler of times and seasons, to Ptah-Sokari, ruler of the tomb, and to the great Tum, who made the heavens and created all the essences coming out of the earth.'

I listened to him with so much interest that the next day he meant to confer a great favor upon me by sending me the entire history of Amen-Heb, written down. I read it once every year, on his birthday. Could any one accuse me of neglecting my duty as a great-uncle?

“Do not deny, my dear, that this mania made you desperate. Then why do you complain? Your son is nearly saved. Heaven has sent Madame de Corneuil to him. She will teach him a great many things of which he is ignorant, and lead him to unlearn a great deal else. In her beautiful eyes he will forget Amenophis III. of the eighteenth dynasty, Amen-Apt the ever-truthful, and the man with the great white cone. Do not grudge him his tardy enjoyment, to say nothing about charity toward a poor nurse of an invalid. Everything is going on well, my dear Mathilde. Write me that, on further reflection, you agree with me.”

The next day but one, the Marquis de Miraval received the following short reply from his niece :

“MY DEAR UNCLE : Your letter and the information you have been so kind as to gather for me have only doubled my anxiety. Madame Corneuil is an intriguer. Why must Horace be caught in her toils? Since I lost my husband, you have been my only counselor and my first re-

sort. Never did I need your assistance more. It is cruel to tear you away from your dear Paris, but I know your kind feelings in my behalf, your care for the interests of our family, and your almost fatherly love for my poor, silly Horace. I implore you to come to Vichy, that we may consult together. I summon you, and shall expect you."

Madame de Penneville was right in thinking it would be hard for her uncle to leave Paris ; since he had left diplomacy, he could not endure any other spot. In the hottest months of summer, when every one goes away, he never dreamed of leaving. He preferred to the most beautiful pine-trees, the tiny-leaved elms, which he saw from the terrace of his club, where he spent the greater part of his days and even of his nights. Nevertheless, this egotist or philosopher always had at heart the interest of his nephew, whom he intended to make his heir ; and, besides, he was very curious about it all, and did not conceal it. With a sigh he ordered his valet to pack his trunks, and that very evening left for Vichy.

Informed by telegraph, Madame de Penneville was waiting for him at the station. She rushed to meet him as soon as he came in sight, saying :

"Fancy it—that woman is a widow, and he really means to marry her !"

"Poor mother !" exclaimed the Marquis. "I agree with you, that things are getting serious."

II.

MONSIEUR DE MIRAVAL was not mistaken in his surmises ; things had gone on just about as he had imagined. The Count Horace de Penneville had made the acquaintance of a beautiful blonde at Cairo, and, for the first time, his heart was touched. They met at the "new hotel" ; from the very first Madame Corneuil took pains to attract the attention and the thought of the young man. Monsieur Corneuil seemed to rally somewhat, and they profited by his improvement to visit together the museum at Boulak, the subterranean ruins of Serapeum, the pyramids of Gizeh and of Sakkarah. Horace took upon himself the office of cicerone in good earnest, and made it both his business and pleasure to explain Egypt to Madame Corneuil, and Madame Corneuil listened to all his explanations with great seriousness and interested attention, occasionally mingled with a mild ecstasy. She seemed rapt and intent, a dull flame glowed in the depths of her eyes ; she possessed in perfection the art of listening with her eyes. She found no difficulty in admitting that Moses lived in the reign of Rameses II. ; she seemed delighted to learn that the second dynasty lasted three hundred years ; that Menes was a native of Thinis ; and that the great pyramid was built gradually by Ka-kau, the Kaiechôs of Manetho, by whom was founded the worship

of the ox Apis, the living manifestation of the god Ptah. She felt all the enthusiasm of a novice initiated in the sacred mysteries of Egyptian chronology, declared that it was the most delightful of all sciences and the most charming of pastimes, and vowed that she would learn to read hieroglyphics.

The *dénouement* took place during a visit to the tomb of Ti, by the reddish glare of torches. They were examining in a sort of ecstasy the pictures graven on the walls of each of the funereal chambers. One of them represented a hunter seated in a bark in the midst of a marsh, in which hippopotami and crocodiles were swimming. As they were bending over the crocodiles, Madame Corneuil, absorbed in her reverie, grew more than usually expansive. The young man was touched with a totally new sensation. She left the tomb first. On joining her without, he became dazzled, and suddenly discovered that she had the bearing of a queen, brown eyes shot with fawn, the most wonderful hair in the world, that she was beautiful as a dream, and that he was wildly in love with her.

A few weeks later, Monsieur Corneuil gave up his soul to God, leaving his entire fortune to his wife, who, to speak the truth, had nursed him with heroic patience. The evening before her embarkation with a leaden coffin for Périgueux, Horace begged the favor of a moment's interview

at night under the starry skies of Egypt, in a delicious atmosphere, wherein flitted the great vague ghosts of the Pharaohs : he then confessed to her his passion, and strove to make her engage herself to him before the year was over. Then did he learn still further all the delicacy of her refined soul. She reproached him with downcast eyes for the eagerness of his love, and that she could not think of so mingling the rose and cypress, and thoughts of love with long crape veils. But she would permit him to write to her, and promised to reply in six months. At parting she smiled upon him demurely but encouragingly. He then ascended the Nile again, reached Upper Egypt, glad to pass his months of waiting in the solitude of Thebais, where the days are more than twenty-four hours in length ; they could not be too long for him to decipher hieroglyphics while thinking of Madame Corneuil. Crocodiles will play a conspicuous part in this story : Horace was at Keri, or Crocodilopolis, when he received an exquisitely written and perfumed note, telling him that the adored being was passing the summer with her mother on the borders of Lake Lemane, at an apartment-house a short distance from Lausanne, and that, if the Count de Penneville should present himself, he need not knock twice for the door to open. He left like an arrow, and ran with one stretch of the bow to Lausanne. He had written a letter of twelve pages to Madame de Penneville,

in which he told to her his good fortune with such effusion of tenderness and of joy as might well have made her despair.

Both uncle and niece spent all their evening in talking, deliberating, and discussing, as generally happens in like cases. The same things were repeated twenty times ; it helps nothing, but is a great comfort. Monsieur de Miraval, who seldom took things tragically, set himself to console the Countess ; but she was inconsolable.

“How, in good faith,” said she, “could you expect me to coolly contemplate the prospect of having for a daughter-in-law a girl sprung from no one knows where ; the daughter of a man of ruined reputation, who married an insignificant man, and separated from him that she might have her own way in Paris ; a woman whose name has been dragged through the ‘Gazette des Tribunaux’ ; a woman who writes descriptions of mists, who composes sonnets, and who, I know, is none too scrupulous ?”

“I do not know about that,” answered the Marquis, “but it has been said for a long time that the most dangerous creatures in the world are the women ‘à sonnets,’ and the serpents ‘à sonnettes.’ I will wager, however, that this woman is a manœuvrer, and that it is a very disagreeable business.”

“Horace, wretched Horace !” exclaimed the Countess, “what grief you cause me !—The dear fellow has a most noble and generous heart ; un-

fortunately, he never had a bit of common sense ; but how could I expect this ? ”

“ Alas ! you had every reason to expect just this,” interrupted the Marquis. “ One can not mistrust too much such precocious wisdom ; it always ends in some calamity. I have told you a hundred times, my dear Mathilde, that your son gave me considerable uneasiness, and that some unfortunate surprise was preparing for us. We are all born with a certain amount of nonsense in us, which we must get rid of ; happy are those who exhaust it in youth ! Horace kept it all till he was twenty-eight years old, capital and interest, and this is the result of all his economy. Many little follies save from greater ones ; when a man only commits one, it is almost always enormous, and generally irreparable.”

Madame de Penneville passed to the Marquis a cup of tea, sweetened by her white hand, and said to him in most caressing tones :

“ My dear uncle, you alone can save us.”

“ In what way ? ” asked he.

“ Horace has so much regard, so much respect for you. You have always had so much authority with him.”

“ Bah ! we no longer live under the *régime* of authority.”

“ But, then, you have always allowed him to look upon himself as your heir ; that gives you a certain right, it seems to me.”

“Come! Young men who live in space, like your son, can easily give up an inheritance. What is an income of a hundred thousand francs compared with a pretty *scarabæus*, emblem of immortality?”

“My dear, dear uncle, I am persuaded that, if you would consent to go to Lausanne—”

The Marquis jumped from his seat. “Good Heavens!” said he. “Lausanne is very far.”

And he heaved a sigh, as his thoughts turned to the terrace at his club.

“Only accept this task, and I will be eternally grateful. You can make the boy listen to reason.”

“My dear Mathilde, once in a while I read over my Latin poets. I know one of them says that madness is allied to love, and that to talk reason to a lover is as absurd as to ask him to rave with moderation, ‘*ut cum ratione insaniat.*’”

“Horace has a heart. You must represent to him that this marriage will drive me to despair.”

“He suspects as much, my dear, since he did not dare to come and greet you on his arrival from Egypt, and you may be sure he will not come until you give your consent. A man loves and respects his mother in vain when he is really on fire, and Horace is that surely. Heavens! his letter proves it. So feverish is the prose that it almost burns the paper.”

Madame de Penneville drew near the Marquis, tenderly stroking his white hair, and putting her arms about his neck :

"You are so shrewd : you have so much tact. I have been told that very difficult missions were intrusted to you in the past, and that you acquitted yourself gloriously."

"O thou cunning one, it is far easier to negotiate with a government than to treat with a lover in the toils of a manœuvrer."

"You can never make me believe that anything is impossible to you."

"You have resolved to bring me into the game," said he to her. "Well, so be it ; the enterprise deserves to be attempted. But, *à propos*, have you replied yet to the formidable letter which you have just read to me?"

"I would do nothing without consulting you."

"So much the better ; nothing is compromised ; the affair is as yet unmeddled with. I will let you know to-morrow if I decide to go to Lausanne."

The Countess thanked Monsieur de Miraval warmly. She thanked him still more warmly the next day when he announced to her that he would do as she wished, and asked her to take him to the station. She accompanied him, for fear he might repent, and on the way said to him :

"This is a journey for all mothers to glory

over ; but, would you be kind enough to write me often from there ? ”

“ Oh, certainly,” answered he, “ but only upon one condition.”

“ What may that be ? ”

“ That you do not believe one single word that I write to you.”

“ What do you mean ? ”

“ I also request of you,” continued he, “ that you answer me as if you really did believe me, and that you send my letters to Horace, begging him to keep them to himself.”

“ I understand you less and less.”

“ What can that be which is beyond the comprehension of a woman ? Open letters are the depths of diplomacy. After all, it is not necessary that you should understand ; the essential thing is that you obey my instructions scrupulously. Good-by, my dear ; I am going to where Heaven and your purrings have sent me. If I do not succeed, it will prove that our friends the Republicans were quite right in shelving me.”

Having thus spoken, he kissed his niece, and stepped into the railway-carriage. He reached Lausanne twenty-four hours later. The first thing which he did after engaging a room at the Hôtel Gibbon was to supply himself with a complete fishing-outfit. After that, tired with his journey, he slept six hours. After waking, he dined ; after dining, he took a carriage for the

apartment-house Vallaud, situated at twenty minutes' distance from Lausanne, upon the brow of one of the most beautiful hills in the world. This charming villa, since changed into an hotel, consisted of a country-house in which the Count de Penneville had an apartment, and a lovely detached chalet which was occupied by Madame Corneuil and her mother. The chalet and the house were separated, or, if it sounds better, united by a large park well shaded, which Horace crossed many times a day, saying to himself, "When shall we live under the same roof?" But one must learn how to wait for happiness.

At that very moment Horace was working, pen in hand, at his great "History of the Hyksos, or the Shepherd Kings, or of the Unclean"—that is to say, of those terrible Canaanitish hordes who, two thousand years before the Christian era, disturbed in their camps by the Elamite invasions of the Kings Chodornakhounta and Chodormabog, swept in their turn over the valley of the Nile, set it on fire, and drenched it in blood, and for more than five centuries occupied both the center and the north of Egypt. Full of learning, and rich in fresh documents collected by him with very great pains, he undertook to show on unquestionable testimony that the Pharaoh under whom Joseph became minister was indeed Apophis or Apepi, King of the Hyksos, and he flattered himself that he could prove it so

strongly that henceforth it would be impossible for the most critical minds to contradict it. A few months previously he had sent from Cairo to Paris the first chapters of his history, which were read at the Institute. His thesis shocked one or two Egyptologists, others thought there was some good in it, while one of them wrote him thus : "Your *début* is promising. *Macte amino, generose puer.*"

Wrapped in a sort of burnous of white woollen stuff, his neck bare, and his hair disordered, he was leaning over a round table, before a writing-desk surmounted by a sphinx. His face wore the expression of a contented heart and a perfectly serene conscience. On the table a beautiful purple rose, almost black, opened its petals ; he had put it into a glass, into which a statuette of blue *faïence*, representing an Egyptian goddess with a cat's face, plunged her impertinent nose without bending into the water. Horace seemed by turns contemplating this very nose and also the flower which Madame Corneuil had gathered for him less than an hour before ; at times also, turning his eye toward the large open window, he saw that the moon, at its fullness, trailed along the shimmering waters of the lake a long row of silver spangles. But, by a fortunate condition of things, he was also wholly absorbed in his work ; he was not in the least distracted from it ; he belonged to the Hyksos. The moon, the rose,

Madame Corneuil, the cat-headed divinity, the sphinx on the *escritoire*, the Unclean, and the King Apepi—were all blended together and become one to his inmost thoughts. The blessed in paradise see all in God, and can thus think of all things without losing for one moment their great idea, which is infinite. The Count Horace was at the same moment at Lausanne in the neighborhood of the woman whose image was never out of his mind, and in Egypt two thousand years before Christ, and his happiness was as complete as his application to his studies.

He had just finished this phrase: "Consider the sculptures of the period of the Shepherd kings; examine carefully and impartially their angular faces, with their prominent cheek-bones; and, if you are fair, you will agree that the race to which the Hyksos belong could not have been purely Semitic, but must have been strongly mixed with the Turanian element."

Satisfied with this ending, he stopped his work for a second, laid down his pen, and, drawing the purple rose nearer to him, pressed it to his lips. Hearing a knock at the door, he quickly returned the rose to its vase, and in a tone of vexation exclaimed, "Come in!" The door opened. Monsieur de Miraval entered. Horace's face grew dark; the unexpected apparition dismayed him; he felt as if he had been suddenly shut out of his paradise. Alas! the happiest

life of all is nothing but an intermittent paradise !

The Marquis, immovable on the threshold, bowed soberly to his nephew, saying to him :

“Ah ! indeed, do I disturb you ? You never knew how to conceal your feelings.”

“My dear uncle,” answered he, “how can you think such a thing ? I was not expecting you, that I must confess. But pray, how did you happen here ?”

“I am traveling in Switzerland. Could I pass through Lausanne without coming to see you ?”

“Own up, uncle, that you were not passing through,” answered Horace ; “own that you are more than a passer-by—that you came here on purpose.”

“You are right, I did come on purpose, my boy,” answered Monsieur de Miraval.

“Then I have the honor of having an ambassador to deal with ?”

“Yes, an ambassador, most strict in etiquette, who insists upon being received with all the respect due to him, and according to the rules concerning the rights of men in his position.”

Horace had recovered from his trouble ; he had recourse to philosophy, and put a good face on a bad business. Offering a chair to the Marquis, he said :

“Be seated, my lord ambassador, in the very

best of my easy-chairs. But, to begin with, let us embrace one another, my dear uncle. If I am not mistaken, it is full two years since we have had the pleasure of seeing one another. What can I offer to entertain you? I think I remember that *champagne frappé* used to be your favorite drink. Do not think you are in a barbarous country ; one can find anything one wishes ; you shall be satisfied at once."

At these words he pulled a bell-rope, and a domestic appeared. He gave him his orders, which were immediately carried out, although slowly. Nevertheless, Monsieur de Miraval looked at his nephew with a satisfaction mingled with secret vexation. It seemed to him that the handsome fellow had grown still handsomer. His short beard was beautifully black ; his features, formerly rather weak, had gained strength, firmness, and emphasis ; his grayish-blue eyes had grown larger, his complexion was sunburned and browned to a tint which became him greatly ; his smile, full of sweetness and mystery, was charming—it was like that undefinable smile which the Egyptian sculptors, whose genius Greece could hardly surpass, carved upon the lips of their statues. The sphinxes in the Louvre would have recognized Horace from his family resemblance, and have claimed him as a relation. It is easy to get the complexion of the country

where one is living, and a face grows often to resemble the thing one most loves.

“Fool of fools!” thought the Marquis angrily; “you have the proudest bearing, the finest head in the world, and you do not know how to put them to a better use. Ah! if at your age I had had such eyes and such a smile, what would I not have done with them! No woman could have resisted me; but you—what can you say for yourself when Providence calls you to account for all the gifts he has bestowed upon you? You will have to say, ‘I profited by them to marry Madame Corneuil.’ Ah! ‘you fool!’ will be the answer, ‘you foolishly ended where others began.’”

Horace was miles away from guessing the secret thoughts of Monsieur de Miraval. After his disagreeable emotion of the first meeting was over, his natural feeling returned, which was that of pleasure at again seeing his uncle, for he loved him well. In truth, it was as an ambassador that he displeased him, but he resolved not to spare him, for, when the will is fixed, objections are less apt to be dreaded, for one knows beforehand how they may all be answered. So he awaited the advance of the enemy with firm step, and, as the enemy was drinking champagne, and evidently in no hurry to commence hostilities, he marched up to meet him.

“First, dear uncle,” said he to him, “give me quickly whatever news you can of my mother.”

“I wish I had something good to tell you about her,” answered the Marquis. “But you know we are anxious about her health, and you must be aware that the letter which she received from you—”

“Did my letter trouble her?”

“Could you doubt it?”

“I love my mother dearly,” answered Horace quickly, “but I have always considered her to be a most reasonable woman. Evidently I did not go to work rightly; I will write to her to-morrow, and try to reconcile her to my happiness.”

“If you think as I do, you will not write again; one evil never undoes another. Your mother assuredly wishes you to be happy, but the extravagant proposition which you confided to her—does the word ‘extravagant’ hurt you? I withdraw it; I meant to say the somewhat singular—well, I withdraw the word ‘singular’ also. But it is often used in that sense in the Chamber of Deputies, and you must not hold yourself higher than a deputy. In short, this proposition, which is neither extravagant nor singular, disturbs your mother greatly, and you will not be able to overcome her objections to it.”

“Has she authorized you to make them known to me?”

“Must I, then, present my credentials?”

“This is all unnecessary, uncle. Say frankly whatever you please—or rather, if you are forti-

fied by good arguments, say nothing at all, for I warn you that you will spend all your eloquence for naught, and I know you never care to waste your words."

"But you may as well resign yourself to listen to me. You can not suppose that I have come a hundred leagues at full gallop for nothing. My speech is ready, and you must submit to it."

"Till morning dawns, if needs be," answered Horace ; "the night shall be devoted to you."

"Thanks. And now let us begin at the beginning. That which has just taken place has not only grieved me much, but cruelly humiliated me. I flattered myself that I understood human nature somewhat, and was quite proud of my knowledge. Now, I must confess, to my own confusion, that I am entirely mistaken in you. What, my son ! can it be that you—whom I considered the most sensible, serious, sober fellow in the world—can think of thus suddenly casting dismay into the bosom of your family by a determination—"

"Extravagant and singular," interrupted Horace.

"I said I would withdraw both of those words ; but, I ask you, does not this project of marriage seem a headstrong thing ?"

"Must I answer you proposition by proposition ?" exclaimed he, "or would you rather give me your whole speech in one breath ?"

"No, that would tire me too much. Answer as I go along."

"Well, dear uncle, let me tell you that you are not at all mistaken in your ideas of me, and that this headstrong act is the most sensible and prudent thing with which my good genius ever inspired me—an act which both my heart and reason approve."

"Then you forbid my surprise that the heir of a good name and large fortune, that a Count de Penneville, who could choose in his own rank, among fifty young girls really worthy of him, refuses every one whom his mother proposes, and suddenly changes his mind to marry—whom? A—madame—Horace, what is her name? I never can remember her nothing of a name."

"Her name is Madame Corneuil, at your service," answered Horace in a piqued tone. "I am sorry if her name displeases you, but spare yourself the trouble of fixing it in your memory. In two months from now you can call her the Countess Hortense de Penneville."

"The deuce! how fast you go! But that is not yet the case."

"We have exchanged words, uncle. You may as well consider it so, for I defy you to undo it."

Monsieur de Miraval filled and emptied his glass anew, then began again:

"Do not get excited, or lose your temper. I would not offend you for anything, but I am so

astonished, so surprised. Tell me, what is that statuette in blue *faïence*, with a halo round about her head, with such a slender figure and the face of a cat, holding a queer sort of a guitar in her right hand?"

"That is no guitar, uncle; it is a timbrel, a symbol of the harmony of the universe. Do you not recognize the statuette to be that of the goddess Sekhet, the Bubastis of Greek authors, whom they call the great lover of Ptah, a divinity by turn beneficent and revengeful, who, according to all appearances, represents the solar radiation in its twofold office?"

"I beg a thousand pardons, I believe I do remember her, and that rose which she seems to smell of somewhat suspiciously—ah! I think I need not ask whence that rose comes."

"Well, yes! it was given me by the woman whose name you can not possibly remember."

"But, permit me—I do know the name quite well—Madame Corneuil—is it not Corneuil? My gentle friend, does it not seem to you that the goddess Sekhet or Bubastis, who represents the solar radiation, fastens her angry glances blazing with indignation upon that purple rose, and curses the rival whom you insolently prefer to her? Take care—roses fade; both roses and givers of them only live for a day, while the goddesses are immortal and their anger also."

"Reassure yourself, uncle," answered Horace

with a smile. "The goddess Sekhet looks with gentle eyes upon that flower. If you should ask her, she would say : 'The fifty heiresses which you have proposed for the Count de Penneville are all or nearly all but foolish creatures, with narrow and frivolous minds, caring only for gew-gaws and trifles ; therefore I approve him decidedly for having disdained these dolls, and for wishing to marry a woman whom there are few like, whose intelligence is as remarkable as her heart is loving ; a woman who adores Egypt and who longs to return thither ; a woman who will not only be the sweetest companion to your nephew, but who will also be passionately interested in his labors, who will aid him by her counsel, and be the confidante of all his thoughts.' "

"And who will deserve to become a member of the Institute like him," interrupted Monsieur de Miraval. "How charming it will be to see you enter it arm-in-arm ! Horace, I will give up reciting the end of my speech to you. Only permit me to ask you a question or two. Where did this incomprehensible accident take place ? Oh ! I remember—your mother told me that it was in a grotto at Memphis."

"My mother was not very prudent," answered Horace ; "but let that go ! It was in the depths of a grotto. We call it a hypogeum."

"Confound the hypogeum ! My ideas are

getting confused. I remember it was in the tomb of the King Ti."

"Ti was not a king, uncle," answered Horace in a tone of mild indulgence. "Ti was one of the great feudal lords, one of the barons of some ruler of the fourth dynasty, which held sway for two hundred and eighty-four years, or perhaps of the fifth, which was also Memphite."

"Heaven keep me from denying it! So you were in the tomb? Inspired by love, Madame Corneuil deciphered fluently a hieroglyphic inscription, and, touched by the beautiful miracle, you fell at her feet."

"Such miracles do not come to pass, uncle. Madame Corneuil does not yet know how to read hieroglyphics, but she will read them some day."

"And is that why you love her, unhappy youth?"

"I love her," exclaimed Horace ardently, "because she is wonderfully beautiful, because she is adorable, because she has every grace, and beside her every other woman seems ugly. Yes, I love her—I have given her my heart and my life for ever! So much the worse for those who do not understand me."

"So it may be," answered the uncle; "but your mother has made inquiries, and evil tongues say that—"

"Enough!" replied Horace, raising his voice. "If any one else but you ventured to hint in that

manner of a woman for whom my respect equals my love, of a woman worthy the regard of every one, he should either have my life or I his ! ”

“ You know that I could not have the slightest desire to fight with my only heir—what would become of the property ? Since you say so, I will be convinced that Madame Corneuil is a person absolutely above reproach. But where the deuce did your mother pick up her information ? She says plainly that she is an ambitious manœuvrer, and that her dream is—are you really sure that this woman is not one of the cunning ones ? Are you very sure that she is sincerely, passionately interested in the exploits of the Pharaohs, and in the god Anubis, guide of souls ? Are you sure that sometimes the greatest effects are produced with slight effort, and that down in the grotto of Ti she might not have been acting a little farce, to which an Egyptologist of my acquaintance has fallen an easy dupe ? For my own part, I believe that if this same handsome fellow had a crooked nose, and dull, squinting eyes, Madame Corneuil would like him just as well, for the excellent reason that Madame Corneuil has got it into her head that some day she will be called the ‘ Countess de Penneville. ’ ”

“ Really, you excite my pity, uncle, and it is very good in me to answer you. To ascribe such miserable calculation, self-interest, and vanity to the proudest, noblest, and purest of souls ! You

ought to blush that you can so lower yourself. She has told me the story of her life, day by day, hour by hour. God knows she has nothing to conceal ! Poor saint, married very young and against her will, through the tyranny of her father, to a man who was not worthy to touch the hem of her garment with the tip of his finger—and yet she forgave him all. If you only knew how tenderly she took care of him in his last moments ! ”

“ But it seems to me, my young friend, that she was well rewarded for her trouble, since he left her his fortune.”

“ And to whom should he have left it ? Had he not everything to make amends for ? No, never did woman suffer more or was more worthy of happiness. One thing only helped her to bear her heavy weight of grief. She was strongly convinced that some day she might meet a man capable of understanding her—whose soul might be on a level with her own. ‘ Yes,’ she said to me the other evening, ‘ I had faith in him. I was sure of his existence, and the first time I saw you it seemed as if I recognized you, and I said to myself, “ May it not be he ? ” ’ Yes, uncle, she and I are one and the same, and it will be the greatest honor of my life. She loves me, I tell you, she loves me—you can not change anything ; so we might as well end here, if you are willing.”

The Marquis passed his hands twice through his white hair, and exclaimed :

“I declare, Horace, you are the frankest of innocents, the most *naïve* of lovers.”

“I assure you, uncle, that you are the most obstinate and incurable of unbelievers.”

“Horace, I call this sphinx and the nose of the goddess Sekhet to witness that poetry is the malady of those who know nothing of life.”

“And I, uncle, I call to witness the moon yonder, and this purple rose, which looks at you and laughs, that skepticism is the punishment of those who may have abused their life.”

“And I—I swear to you by that which is most sacred, by the great Sesostris himself—”

“O uncle, what a blunder ! I know that you should not be blamed for it, for you have hardly studied the history of Egypt, and it is no business of yours, but know that there has never been so exaggerated and even usurped reputation as that of the man whom you call the great Sesostris, and whose name really was Rameses II. Swear, if you choose, by the King Cheops, conqueror of the Bedouins ; swear by Menes, who built Memphis ; swear by Amenophis III., called Memmon ; or, if you like it better, by Snefrou, last king but one of the third dynasty, who subdued the nomadic tribes of Arabia Petræa ; but know that your great Sesostris was at bottom a very mediocre man, of very slight merit, who carried his

vanity so far as to have the names of the sovereigns who preceded him erased from the monuments and substituted his own, which had weight with superficial minds, Diodorus Siculus particularly, and introduced thereby the most unfortunate mistakes in history. Your Sesostris, good Heavens ! he has only lived upon one exploit of his youth. Either through address or through luck, he managed to get through an ambuscade with life and baggage unharmed. That was the great achievement which he had engraved hundreds and hundreds of times on the walls of all the buildings erected during his reign ; that was his eternal Valmy, his everlasting Jemappes. I ask you what were his conquests ? He managed to capture negroes because he wanted masons, he hunted down men in Soudan, and his only claim to glory was in having had one hundred and seventy children, of whom sixty-nine were sons."

"Goodness ! that is no small thing ; but, after all, what conclusion do you reach from that ?"

"I conclude," answered Horace, who had lost sight of the principal topic in this digression—"I conclude that Sesostris—no," replied he, "I conclude that I adore Madame Corneuil, and that before three months she shall be my wife."

The Marquis rose hastily, exclaiming, "Horace, my heir and my great-nephew, come to my arms !"

And as Horace, immovable, looked at him

astonished—"Must I say it again? Come to my arms," continued he. "I am pleased with you. Your passion really makes me young once more. I admire youth, love, and frankness. I thought you only had a fancy for this woman, a whim, but I see your heart is touched, and one can do no better than to listen to the voice of the heart. Forgive my foolish questions and my impertinent objections. What I said was to acquit my conscience. Your mother gave me my lesson, and I repeated it like a parrot. We must not get angry with these poor mothers; their scruples are always to be respected."

"Ah, there you touch a tender and sore point," interrupted the young man, "but I know how to bring her back—I will write her to-morrow."

"Let me say one word more—do not write; your prose has not the power of pleasing her. She has great confidence in me; my words will have weight. My son, I am all ready to go over to the enemy if this lovely woman who lives near you is really what you say. I will be your advocate with your mother, and we will make her listen to reason. Will you introduce me to Madame Corneuil?"

"Are you really sincere, uncle?" asked Horace, looking at him with mistrust and defiance. "Can I depend upon your loyalty?"

"Upon the faith of an uncle and a gentleman!" interrupted the Marquis in his turn.

"If that be so, we can embrace this time in good earnest," answered Horace, taking the hand held out to him.

The uncle and nephew staid talking together for some time longer, like good friends. It was near midnight when Monsieur de Miraval remembered that his carriage was in waiting for him in the road to take him back to his hotel. He rose and said to Horace :

"It is settled, then, that you will introduce me to-morrow ?"

"Yes, uncle, at two o'clock precisely."

"Is that the hour when you see her ?"

"One of my hours. I never work between breakfast and dinner."

"So everything is ruled to order, like music-paper. You are right ; there must be method in all things. Even in love everything must be done by weight, number, and measure. I knew a philosopher once who said that measure was the best definition of God. But, by the way, I took a nap this afternoon, and am not in the least sleepy. Lend me a book for company after I go to bed. You, doubtless, own the writings of Madame. Corneuil ?"

"Could you doubt that ?"

"Don't give me her novel ; I have already read that."

"It is a real masterpiece," said Horace.

"There is rather too much fog in it to suit my

taste. There is a rumor that she has published sonnets."

"They are real gems," exclaimed he.

"And an essay on the apostleship of woman."

"A wonderful book!" exclaimed he again.

"Lend me the essay and the sonnets. I will read them to-night, that I may be prepared for to-morrow's interview."

Horace began at once to search for the two volumes, which he found with great difficulty. By means of rummaging, he discovered them at last under a great pile of quartos, which were crushing them with their terrible weight. He said to his uncle as he gave them to him :

"Keep them as the apple of your eye. For she gave them to me."

"Give yourself no uneasiness; I appreciate the preciousness of the treasure," answered the Marquis.

In the same breath he observed that the treatise was only half cut, and that the volume of sonnets was not cut at all, which gave rise to certain reflections of his own; but he carefully kept them to himself.

III.

THIS world is full of mysterious events, and Hamlet was right in saying that there were more things in heaven and earth than were dreamed of in Horatio's philosophy.

It has been observed that during the time of great wars, when different peoples coming from all parts of a great empire find themselves suddenly brought together in an army to serve a campaign, strange contagions and fatal epidemics spring up among them, and a great thinker has dared to attribute the cause of it to the forced propinquity of men totally unlike in disposition, in language, and in intellect, who, not having been made to live together, are brought in contact by an evil caprice of destiny. It has also been remarked that, when the crew of the ship which annually brings the necessary provisions for their subsistence to the poor inhabitants of the Shetland Isles land on their shores, they are seized with a spasmodic cough, and do not cease coughing until the ship has again set sail. It is also said that at the approach of a strange vessel the natives of the Faroe Isles are attacked by a catarrhal fever, which it is very difficult to get rid of. Finally, it is stated that sometimes the arrival of a single missionary at one of the South-Sea islands is enough to bring on a dangerous epidemic, to decimate the wretched savages.

This may perhaps explain why, during the night of August 13, 1878, the beautiful Madame Corneuil was greatly disturbed in her sleep, and why on waking the next morning she felt as if her whole body had been bruised. It was not the plague, it was no cholera, no catarrhal fever,

no spasmodic cough, but she felt a certain tightness about the head, a disturbance, and a very peculiar nervous irritation : and she had a presentiment that there was danger near, or that an enemy had just landed. Yet she did not know about the Marquis de Miraval, had never even heard of him ; she little knew that he was more dangerous than any missionary who ever landed on the islands of the Pacific.

As her mother, who was always the first to enter her chamber to lavish upon her those attentions which she alone knew how to make agreeable, drew near the bed on tiptoe and wished her good morning, Madame Corneuil, out of humor, gave her a rather cool greeting. Madame Vézretz readily perceived that her adored angel was out of sorts. This indulgent mother was somewhat accustomed to her whim. She was made for it, and did not mind. Her daughter was her queen, her divinity, her all ; she devoted herself entirely to her happiness and her glory ; she actually worshiped her with real adoration. She belonged to that race of mothers who are servants and martyrs ; but her servitude pleased her, her martyrdom was sweet to her, and the thin little woman, with her quick eye, her serpentine gait, who, like Cato the Censor, whom she resembled in nothing else, had greenish eyes and red hair, always looked pleasantly upon the hardships she had to bear.

She had her own consolations. She might be snubbed, scolded, and sent off, but it always ended by her being listened to, especially if it was to be of any benefit. It was at her advice that at the propitious moment they quarreled with Monsieur Corneuil, and afterward were reconciled to him. Thanks to her valuable suggestions, they had been able to hold a *salon* in Paris, and to become of some importance there. Madame Corneuil reigned, while really it was Madame Véretz who governed, and it must be said she never had any other end in view but the good fortune of her dear idol. We all have confused ideas of our own which we can hardly unravel, and hidden desires which we dare not confess to ourselves. Madame Véretz had the gift of comprehending her daughter, and reading the inmost recesses of her heart. She undertook to unravel her confused ideas, and to reveal to her her unacknowledged wishes, and took charge of them. That was the secret of her influence, which was considerable. When Madame Corneuil's imagination wandered, her incomparable mother started out as her courier. On reaching the station, the fair traveler found her relays of horses all ready, and she was under great obligations to her mother for arranging many an agreeable surprise for her. She would have taken great care not to embark in any scheme without her courier, to whom she was obliged for never allowing her to rest by the way.

After having sent off her mother, and spent half an hour with her maid, Madame Corneuil took a cup of tea, then seated herself at her secretary. She spent her mornings in writing a book, which was to form a sequel to her treatise upon the "Apostleship," to be called "The Position of Woman in Modern Society." To speak plainly, she was merely making the same ideas serve her a second time. Her aim was to show that in democratic society, committed to the worship of the greatest number, the only corrective to coarseness of manners, thought, and interest, would be the sovereignty of woman. "Kings are dying out," she wrote the night before, in a moment of inspiration—"let them go; but we must not let them bear away with them that true kingliness whose benefits are necessary even to republics. Let women sit on the thrones which they leave empty. With them will reign virtue, genius, sublime aspirations, delicacy of heart, disinterested sentiments, noble devotion, and noble scorn." I may have spoiled her phrases, but I think I have given the gist of them all. I think, also, that, in the portrait she drew, the superior woman whom she proposed for the worship of human kind resembled astonishingly Madame Corneuil, and she could not think of herself without her splendid hair of golden blonde twisted around her brow like a diadem.

After a bad night one does not feel like writ-

ing. That day Madame Corneuil was not in the mood. The pen felt heavy to the pretty hand, with its polished nails ; both ideas and expression failed her. In vain she twisted a loose curl over her forefinger, in vain did she look at her rosy finger-tips—nothing came of it ; she began to fancy that a shadow of coming misfortune fell between her and the paper. Heaven knows that in like cases every pains was taken to save her nerves, to cause her no interruption, such were the orders. During those hours when she was known to be within her sanctum, the most profound silence reigned everywhere. Madame Véretz saw to that. Every one spoke in a whisper and stepped softly ; and when Jacquot, who did the errands, crossed the paved courtyard, he took great care to take off his *sabots*, lest he might be heard. This precaution on his part was the result of sad experience. Jacquot played the horn in his leisure moments. One morning when he took the liberty of playing, Madame Véretz, coming upon him unawares, gave him a vigorous box on the ear, saying to him : “Keep still, you little idiot ! don’t you know that she is meditating ?” Jacquot rubbed his cheek, and took it as it was said. Everybody did the same. So from eight till noon Jacquot whispered to the cook, and the cook told the coachman, and the coachman told the hens in the yard, who repeated it to the sparrows, who repeated it to the swallows, and to all

the winds of heaven, "Brothers, let us keep silence—she is meditating!"

When it struck noon, the door of the holy place opened softly, and, as before, Madame Véretz advanced on the tips of her toes, asking, "My dear beauty, may I be allowed to enter?"

Madame Corneuil scowled with her beautiful eyebrows, and poutingly placed her papers in the most elegant portfolio, and her portfolio in the depths of her rosewood secretary, taking care to take out the key, for fear of robbers.

"Orders must have been given," said she, "not to leave me a moment in peace."

"I was obliged to go out this morning," answered Madame Véretz; "did Jacquot happen to take advantage of my absence?"

"Jacquot, or some one else, I do not know who; but they made a great deal of noise, and moved about the furniture. Was it absolutely necessary for you to go out?"

"Absolutely. You complained yesterday that the fish was not fresh, and that Julia did not understand buying; so henceforth I shall do my own marketing."

"And during that time, then, there must be a fearful racket."

"What can you do? Between two evils—"

"No," interrupted Madame Corneuil, "I do not wish you to go yourself and bargain for fish; why do you not teach Julia how to select it?"

You do not know how to order others, and so it ends in your doing everything yourself."

"I will learn, I will try to improve, my darling," answered Madame Véretz, kissing her forehead tenderly.

She did not add that she liked to go to market, which was the truth. Among people who rise from small beginnings, some resent their past, and strive to forget it, while it pleases others to recall it.

"What have you there?" exclaimed Madame Corneuil, seeing just then that her mother held a bit of writing in her hand.

"This, my dear, is a note in which Monsieur de Penneville begs me to inform you that his great-uncle, the Marquis de Miraval, arrived yesterday from Paris, and has expressed a desire to be introduced, and that he will bring him here at two o'clock exactly. You know he is a victim to the stroke of the clock."

"What prevented him from coming to tell us himself?"

"Apparently he feared disturbing you, and perhaps he did not care to disarrange his own plans. In all well-ordered lives the first rule is to work until noon."

Madame Corneuil grew impatient.

"Who may this great-uncle be? Horace never told me about him."

"I can easily believe that. He never speaks of anything but you—or himself—or Egypt."

"But if I choose that he should talk to me about him!" answered Madame Corneuil haughtily. "Is that another epigram?"

"Do you think I could make epigrams against that dear, handsome fellow?" hastily answered Madame Véretz. "I already love him like a son."

Madame Corneuil seemed to have grown thoughtful.

"I had bad dreams last night," said she. "You laugh at my dreams, because you like to laugh at my expense. Now see: In coming from Paris, Monsieur de Miraval must have passed through Vichy. This Marquis is dangerous."

"Dangerous!" exclaimed Madame Véretz; "what danger have you to fear?"

"You see Madame de Penneville has sent him here."

"Can you believe that Horace—ah! my poor goose, are you not sure of his heart?"

"Is any one ever sure of a man's heart?" answered she, feigning an anxiety which she was far from feeling.

"Perhaps not of any man's," said Madame Véretz, smiling; "but the heart of an Egyptologist is quite another thing, and never changes. As far as sentiment goes, Egyptology is the one unchangeable thing."

"I told you I had bad dreams, and that the Marquis is dangerous to us."

"Here is my reply," was her mother's answer, as she passed her a mirror in such a way as to oblige her to see herself in it.

"It seems to me as if I looked like a fright this morning," said Madame Corneuil, who thought nothing of the sort.

"You are beautiful as the day, my dear countess, and I defy all the marquises in the world—"

"No, I will not receive this great-uncle," began Hortense again, as she pushed aside the mirror; "you may receive him in my place. Do you think I am obliged to endure impertinences?"

"There you are!—you are putting things at their worst; you are getting excited, forgetting yourself, and rushing at conclusions."

"I tell you once more, I am ill."

"My dear idol, one must never be ill except at the suitable moment; and in this case take care, or he will fancy you are afraid of him."

Madame Corneuil, on reflection, evidently was convinced that her mother was right, for she said to her:

"Since you wish me to submit to be so bored, so be it! Order my breakfast to be brought up, and send my maid to me."

"Nothing could be better," answered Madame Véretz. "Ah, my dear! I am not inflicting a bore upon you—it is a victory which I am preparing for you."

At these words she withdrew, not without kissing her for the second time.

At two o'clock precisely, Madame Véretz, seated in an *ajoupa* opposite the veranda of the chalet, awaits the Count de Penneville and Monsieur de Miraval; at two o'clock precisely the Marquis and the Count appeared on the horizon. The presentation was made with proper formality, and soon conversation began. Madame Véretz was a woman of great tact in all difficult circumstances; the unexpected never disconcerted her; she knew how to receive an uncomfortable visitor as well as a disagreeable event. Monsieur de Miraval, however, gave her no occasion to practice that virtue. He was thoroughly courteous and gracious; he brought all the amiability and brilliancy of his past grandeur to bear on this occasion; he took as much pains as he formerly did for the sovereigns of the world who gave him audience. Where was the use of having been a diplomat if not to possess the art of talking a great deal without saying anything? He had words at his command, and, when it was necessary, a fluent eloquence, the art of "pouring honey over oil," as the Russian proverb has it. Everything went on well. Horace, who had greatly dreaded the interview, and who at first appeared constrained and disturbed, was soon over his anxiety, and felt his embarrassment at an end. It was part of his character to

be quickly reassured. He was not only a born optimist, but he had gone too deeply into the theology of Egypt not to know that in the human world, as in the divine, the struggle between the two principles ends generally in the triumph of the good, that Typhon finally submits to be disarmed, and Horus, the beneficent deity, takes in hand the government of the universe. The Count de Penneville's face expressed profound faith in the final triumph of Horus, the beneficent deity.

The ice was entirely broken when Madame Corneuil made her appearance. We may easily believe that she had taken great pains for this occasion with her toilet and the arrangement of her hair ; her half-mourning was most charming. It must be granted that there are queens who strongly resemble ordinary people, so there are ordinary people who resemble queens, barring the crown and the king. That day Madame Corneuil was not merely a queen, she was a goddess from head to foot. She might have been described as Juno appearing from a cloud. Neither did she fail in her manner of entrance. On seeing her approach, the Marquis could not repress a thrill of emotion, and, when he drew nearer to her to greet her with bowed head, he lost his self-command, which seldom happened to him ; he stood confused, began several sentences without being able to finish them : it is said that

it was the first time in his life that such a mishap had happened to him. His disturbance was so great that Horace, who usually never noticed anything, could not help remarking it.

Monsieur de Miraval made a great effort, and was not long in recovering his confidence and all his ease of manner. After a few trifling remarks, he began to relate pleasantly several anecdotes of his diplomatic career, which he seasoned with graceful wit and a grain of salt.

As he told his little stories, he went on talking with himself. "There is no denying it, she is very beautiful ; she is a superior woman, fit for a king. What eyes ! what hair ! what shoulders ! Can she be the daughter of such a mother, and that from that red hair come all those beautiful, fair locks ? There is no denying, her beauty irritates and exasperates me. If I were forty years younger, I would be one of her suitors. Really, she is superb. Can I find any fault with her ? Yes, there is a restlessness in her eyes which I do not like. Her lips are rather thin—bah ! that is only a foible. Heaven be thanked ! there is no ink-spot on her finger-ends, but they are too tapering, too nervous, and look like hands ready to clutch. Her eyelids are too long—they can conceal a great deal. Her voice is well modulated, but metallic ; still, if I were forty years younger—"

The Marquis went on telling stories. Ma-

dame Véretz was all ears, and smiled in the best possible grace. As for Madame Corneuil, she did not desist from a somewhat disdainful gravity of bearing. She had come upon the scene with a certain part to play; she had got it into her head that she was to appear before an ill-disposed judge, who had come expressly to take her measure and to weigh her in the balance. So she armed herself with Olympian majesty and that insolence of beauty which tramples impertinence under foot, crushes the haughty, and transforms Actæons into deer. Although the Marquis's politeness was faultless and emphatic, and although he besought her to look favorably upon him, she remained firm and would not be disarmed. Horace listened to all with great satisfaction; he thought his uncle charming, and could hardly keep from embracing him. He also thought that Madame Corneuil never had been more beautiful, that the sunlight was brighter than ever, that it streamed down upon his happiness, that the air was full of perfume, and that everything in the world went on wonderfully. Now and then a slight shadow fell like a cloud before his eyes. In reading over that morning the fragments of Manetho, he stumbled upon a passage which seemed contradictory to his favorite argument, which was dear to him as life itself. At intervals he began to doubt whether it really was during the reign of Apepi that Jo-

seph, son of Jacob, came into Egypt ; then he reproached himself for his doubt, which came back to him the next moment. This contradiction grieved him greatly, for he had a great regard for Manetho. But when he looked at Madame Corneuil his soul was at rest again, and he fancied he could read in her beautiful eyes a proof that the Pharaoh who knew not Joseph must have been Sethos I., in which case the Pharaoh who did know him must have been the King Apepi. To be tenderly loved by a beautiful woman makes it easy to believe anything, and all things become possible—Manetho, Joseph, the King Apepi, and all the rest.

What was passing in the heart of the Marquis? To what conquering charm was he the prey? The fact was, he no longer resembled himself. He had made an excellent beginning, and Madame Véretz was delighted with his tales. Little by little his animation grew languid. This man, who was so great a master over his own thoughts, could no longer control them ; this man, so great a master in conversation, really was seeking in vain for the proper words. He struggled for some time against this strange fascination which deprived him of his faculties, but it was all in vain. He no longer took part in the conversation, except in a few loose phrases, which were absolutely irrelevant, and soon fell into a deep reverie and the dullest silence.

"My mother was right," said Madame Corneuil. "I have quite overawed him; I have made him afraid of me."

And so, applauding herself for having silenced the batteries of the besieger and put out his fires, a smile of satisfied pride hovered around her lips. A moment after she rose to walk around the garden, and Horace hastened to follow her.

The Marquis remained alone with Madame Véretz. He followed the pair of lovers with his eyes for a little while, as they slowly withdrew and finally disappeared behind the shrubbery. The spell seemed then to be unloosed. Monsieur de Miraval regained his voice, and, turning toward Madame Véretz, he exclaimed dramatically: "No, nothing has ever been created yet more beautiful than youth, more divine than love. My nephew is a fortunate fellow. I congratulate him aloud, but I keep my envy to myself."

Madame Véretz rewarded this ejaculation with a gracious smile which signified: "Good old fellow! we judged you wrongly. How can you serve us best?"

"The more I see them together, Monsieur le Marquis," said she, "the more I am convinced that they were made for one another. Never were two characters better matched: they have the same likes and the same dislikes, the same elevated tone of mind, the same scorn of mediocre ideas and petty calculation, the same disregard

of vulgar interests. They both live in paradise. Ah ! Monsieur le Marquis, only a providential dispensation could have brought them together."

"Very providential," said the Marquis, but he added, *in petto*, "A manœuvring mother is the surest of all providences." Then he resumed aloud : "After all, what is the aim of it? Happiness. My nephew is right to consider his affection only. He can have his paradise, as you call it, madame, and all the rest into the bargain ; for Madame Corneuil—We will not speak of her beauty, which is incomparable, but it is impossible to see her or to hear her speak without recognizing her to be a most superior woman, the most suitable in the world to give a man good counsel, and to lead him onward, to push him forward."

"You certainly judge her correctly," answered Madame Véretz. "My daughter is a strange being ; she is full of noble enthusiasm which she carries at times to exaltation, and yet she is thoroughly reasonable, very intelligent as regards the things of this world, and, at the same time, ice to her own interests and on fire for others."

"Only one thing distresses me," said the Marquis to her. "The story-teller advises all happy lovers to roam only to neighboring shores, and ours are going to bury their happiness in Memphis or in Thebes. It would be a crime to take Madame Corneuil away from Paris."

“Reassure yourself,” said she; “Paris will have them back again.”

“You do not know my nephew: he has a horror of that perverse and frivolous city. He confided to me yesterday that he means to end his days in Egypt, and assured me that Madame Corneuil was as much in love as he was with the solitude and silence of the region of Thebaid. He appears very gentle, but there never was a person of more determined will.”

“Heaven help him!” said Madame Véretz, looking at the Marquis as if she would say, “My fine friend, there is no will which can hold against ours, and Paris can no more do without us than we without Paris.”

“They have chosen the good part,” continued Monsieur de Miraval with a deep sigh. “I have often laughed at my nephew, blaming him because he did not know how to enjoy life; now it is his turn to laugh at me, for I am reduced to envying his happiness. There comes an age when one regrets bitterly not having been able to make a home for one’s self. But you must be astonished, madame, at my confidences.”

“I am rather flattered by them, than astonished,” answered she.

“I am devoured by *ennui*, I must acknowledge. I had determined to pass the remainder of my days in retirement and in quiet, but *ennui* will yet force me out of my den. I shall plunge

into active political life again. I have been urged to stand for the arrondissement where my château is situated, and have also been proposed for the senate. I might go still higher if I were married to a woman of sense, intelligent in the things of this world, in spite of her enthusiasms. Women are a great means of success in politics. Would that I had a wife ! as the poet says : ‘ Have I passed the season of love ? Ah ! if my heart,’ etc., etc. I can not remember the rest of it, but never mind. Lucky Horace ! thrice happy ! What a vast difference there is between living in Egypt with the beloved, and bustling about Paris in the whirl of politics without the beloved ! ”

Madame Véretz in truth thought the difference vast, but greatly to the advantage of the bustle and the whirl. She could not help thinking, “ It would be perfect if my future son-in-law only had the tastes and inclinations of his uncle ; there would be nothing more to wish for.”

From that moment, the Marquis de Miraval became a most interesting being to her. She tried to reconcile him to his fate, and, as she had a genius for detail and for business, she asked him a great many questions about his electoral arrondissement and his chances of election. The Marquis, somewhat embarrassed, replied as best he could. He could not get out of it except by changing the subject, and so he gave the inquisitive woman a full description of his château,

which was doubtless well worth the trouble, only he seldom visited it. The minute information which he gave respecting his estates and their revenues was not of such a nature as to chill the interest which she was beginning to take in him.

During all this time, Madame Corneuil strolled through a path in the garden with Horace, who did not notice that her nerves were greatly excited and that she was somewhat ruffled. There were a great many things which the Count de Penneville never noticed.

“Heavens ! what beautiful weather,” said he to her ; “what a beautiful sky, what a beautiful sun ! Still it is not the sun of Egypt ! when shall we see it again ? ‘Oh, thither, thither, let us go,’ as says the song of Mignon. You must sing that song to me to-night ; no one sings it like you. This park never seemed so green to me as now. There is no denying the beauty of green grass, although I can get along wonderfully well without it. I once knew a traveler who thought Greece horrible because there were so few trees. There are people who are wild on the subject of trees. Do you remember our first excursion to Gizeh—the vast bare plain, the wavy hills, the ochre-colored sand ? You said, ‘I could eat it !’

“We met a long line of camels ; I can see them now. The pyramids pierced the horizon, and they seemed white and sparkling. How they stood out against the sky ! They seemed quiver-

ing. The air here never quivers. What a good breakfast we had in that chapel! You wore a *tarbouch* on your head, and it became you like a charm. When shall I see you in a *tarbouch* again? The turkey was somewhat lean, I remember, and I made a great blunder—I let fall the jar which held our Nile-water. We laughed at it well, and had to drink our wine unmixed. After which we descended into the grotto, and I interpreted hieroglyphics to you for the first time. I shall never forget your delight at my telling you that a lute meant happiness, because the sign of happiness was the harmony of the soul. In the Chinese writings, happiness is represented by a handful of rice. After that, who could contest the immense superiority of soul in the genius of the Egyptians over the inhabitants of the Celestial Empire?"

At last he discovered that Madame Corneuil made no reply to him; he sought for an explanation and soon found it.

"How did the Marquis de Miraval impress you?" asked he of her with an anxious voice.

This time she answered.

"He is very *distingué*. He begins stories remarkably well, but finishes them poorly. Must I be sincere?"

"Absolutely sincere."

"He does not please me much."

"Did he say anything to offend you?" exclaimed Horace, who was afraid his uncle might

have been disagreeable while his mind was wandering with Manetho and the King Apepi.

"He is a man of talent," answered she, "but I like some soul, and I suspect he has none."

As she spoke these words she fastened her great brown eyes on the face of the young man ; he saw a soul in their depths ; he might perhaps have seen two.

"You must be frank in your turn," resumed she. "You do not know how to tell a lie, and for that I love you a little. You told me that you were going to write to Madame de Penneville. The Marquis is her answer."

"I must say it is so," said he, "but, if the whole universe should put itself between you and me, it would have its trouble for nothing. You know that I love and that I adore you."

"Your heart, then, is indeed mine, wholly mine?" asked she, with a most bewitching glance.

"For ever, for ever yours," answered he, with voice half choked.

They drew near an arbor, the entrance to which was narrow. Madame Corneuil went in first, and when Horace joined her she stood motionless before him, gazing at him with a melancholy smile. Until that moment she kept him at a distance, without allowing him to make any advances, but now by a sudden impulse she lifted up lips and forehead to him, as if to claim a kiss. He understood, and yet hardly dared hope that he had

understood. He hesitated, but at last touched rightly her lips with his. He felt ill. Only once before had he felt the same wild emotion. It was one day near Thebes, when making an excavation, he saw with his eyes—his own eyes—at the bottom of the trench, a great sarcophagus of rose-granite. That day, too, he grew faint.

Madame Corneuil sat down ; he fell at her feet, and, with elbows upon the beloved knees, he devoured her glances for a while. There was only the width of a path between the arbor and the lake ; they heard the waves whispering to the beach. She stammered a few words of love ; she spoke of that joy and mystery which no human tongue can express.

After a long silence Madame Corneuil said :

“ Great happiness is always restless and uneasy, everything frightens it—it is scared at everything. I implore you get rid of this diplomat. I never liked diplomats. All they can see in the world is prejudice, interest, calculation, and vanity.”

“ Your wishes are sacred to me,” said he to her, “ and, even if I must for ever break with him, I will do everything to please you, although I have always returned the friendship he has borne for me.”

“ Yes, send him back to his family, who must object to our having him. May he return soon to tell his stories to them ! ”

“But allow me—I am his family ; he is unmarried, or rather he has been a widower for thirty years, and has neither son nor daughter. But what do I care for his property ?”

At these words Madame Corneuil came out of her rapture, and pricked up her ears like a dog who scents unexpected game.

“His property ! You his heir ! You never told me so.”

“And why should I have told you ? What is money to us ? This is my treasure,” added he, in trying to get a second kiss, which she wisely refused, for one must not be too lavish.

“Yes, how base a trifle the whole subject of money is !” said she. “Is the Marquis very rich ?”

“My mother says that he has two hundred thousand livres income. He may do what he chooses with it. Since he does not please you, I will tell him plainly that I renounce my place as his heir.”

“It must all be done with propriety,” answered Madame Corneuil with considerable animation. “You are fond of him. It would make me wretched to set you against a relation whom you love.”

“I would give up all for you,” exclaimed he ; “the rest seems so small.”

He remained a little longer at her feet ; but to his great grief she made him rise, saying :

“Monsieur de Miraval must remark our long absence from him. We must be polite.”

Two minutes after she entered the pavilion, whither Horace followed her, and greeted the Marquis with a tinge of affability which she had not shown before ; but, although she had changed her expression and manner, the spell was not broken, and its effect was even more perceptible. Monsieur de Miraval, after having recovered all his wits in conversing with Madame Véretz, and giving her all sorts of confidences, was disturbed anew at the appearance of his beautiful enemy. He replied to all her advances in incoherent phrases, and sentences without head or tail, which might have fallen from the moon. Soon, as if angry with himself and his undignified weakness. he rose hastily, and, turning toward Madame Véretz with a profound bow, took his leave of her ; then, advancing toward Madame Corneuil, he looked her full in the eyes, and said to her with a sort of fierceness in his voice :

“Madame, I came, I saw, and I have been conquered.”

Thereupon he withdrew like one wishing to get away, and forbade his nephew to accompany him. It can be easily imagined that after his departure he was freely discussed. All agreed that his conduct was peculiar ; but Madame Véretz protested that she thought him more charming than odd, but Madame Corneuil thought him

more odd than charming. Horace, for his part, tried to explain the eccentricity of his conduct by his varying state of health, or by a certain whimsical disposition excusable at his age. He acknowledged that he had never seen him so before, but had always known him to be a *bon vivant*, active, of good memory, witty, and easily adapting himself to all.

“There is some mystery about it that you must take pains to clear up,” said Madame Corneuil to him ; and as he looked at his watch and was about to withdraw—“By the way, lazy boy,” said she to him, “when are you going to read me the famous fourth chapter of your ‘History of the Hyksos’? You must remember that you were to read it some evening with a midnight supper in its honor. We must have that supper in Paris. Will it not be delicious?”

At thought of the little private banquet in honor of Apepi, Horace’s heart thrilled with delight and his eyes beamed.

“I will send you nothing until it is worthy of you. Give me ten days more.”

“Ten days—that is a century!” said she ; “but keep your word, or I shall break with you.”

As he drew away she added, “The next time you meet Monsieur de Miraval, be distrustful and be shrewd.”

“He shrewd!” exclaimed Madame Véretz,

when alone with her daughter; "you might as well order him to swim across the lake."

"Is that meant for another epigram?" said Madame Corneuil crossly.

"Since I adore him as he is," answered the mother, "what more can you expect? As for Monsieur de Miraval, you are quite wrong to worry yourself on his account. My opinion is, that he is entirely won over to our side."

"It is not mine," answered Madame Corneuil.

"At all events, my dear, we must treat him with great tact, for I know from the very best authority—"

"You are going to tell me," interrupted Madame Corneuil disdainfully, "that he has an income of two hundred thousand livres, and that Horace is his heir. Such base trifles are like affairs of state to you."

Soon after she said to her mother, "Then ask Horace to invite him to breakfast with us at an early day."

IV.

THE next afternoon the Count de Penneville went to the Hôtel Gibbon, hoping to see his uncle there, but he did not find him. He left his card with a few words to express his regret at having taken his drive for naught, and to tell him that Madame Véretz and daughter would be happy to

see the Marquis de Miraval at breakfast on the following day. The Marquis sent him his reply in the evening ; he said that he was not well, and begged his nephew to excuse him to the ladies, whose kind attention touched him deeply. Uneasy about his uncle's health, Horace went in the morning, contrary to all his habitual custom, to inquire for him. This time also the nest was empty, and the Count had both the regret at having lost his steps for nothing and the pleasure of concluding that the invalid must be well again.

Urged by Madame Corneuil, he wrote to convey to him another invitation to breakfast. The Marquis replied by special dispatch that he had just decided to return to Paris, and was much grieved that he had not even time enough to bid them good-by.

This sudden and unexpected departure excited the *pension* Vallaud greatly. They talked of it for a full hour by the clock, and they talked of it on the days following. Monsieur de Penneville was the first to get over his surprise. "Come what may," thought he, "I am firm as a rock," and he would soon have begun to think of something else. The mother and daughter were less philosophical. Madame Véretz was painfully surprised, and keenly disturbed at having been so mistaken, for she prided herself upon never having been mistaken. Madame Corneuil said to her triumphantly :

"I congratulate you upon your penetration. You said that Monsieur de Miraval was entirely gained over to our side. It turns out that all his kindness did not even reach the first principles of civility. He came as a spy, and he has gone back at once to report to Madame de Penneville. We shall soon hear from him, and the news will not be very pleasant. I am quite sure that you did not know how to behave with him, and said something which compromises us."

"Is that the way I am in the habit of doing, my dear?" answered Madame Véretz. "I confess that such conduct surprises me. It is contrary to all my notions of the customs of nations. Before going to war, a gentleman should declare it. This monster has concealed his game well."

"You have always been blindly confident."

"And yet evil tongues persist that I am a successful manœuvring mother. Do not overwhelm me, my darling; what distresses me is that an inheritance of two hundred thousand livres' income does not grow on every bush."

"You think of nothing but the inheritance. That may well be questioned; but there is some dark plot going on, of which we shall soon see the results. This old fellow is going to play some trick of his own upon us."

"Let us wait awhile," said Madame Véretz;

"it needs heavy cannon to take fortresses. Say what you like, we may sleep at our ease in our beds."

Three days after, Madame Véretz, unknown to her daughter, went out very early to do her own marketing, and, on her return, entered stealthily into the apartment of the Count de Penneville, opened the door of his study, and with hand upon the latch said to him :

"Do you want to know something, my pretty bluebird? Monsieur de Miraval has not left Lausanne. I just met him crossing the Place Saint-François."

"That is impossible !" answered he, dropping his pen.

"Perhaps it is impossible, but it is more true than impossible," said she, rushing off.

Horace went forthwith to the Hôtel Gibbon, and was no more successful than before. He returned in the evening, and his perseverance was at last rewarded. He was overjoyed to see Monsieur de Miraval assisting his digestion by smoking a cigar on the terrace of the hotel.

"Well, uncle," said he, "I thought you had gone?"

"The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak," answered the Marquis. "Lausanne is such a delightful town that I had not the courage to tear myself away."

"Condescend to explain."

"Come up into my room," interrupted he ;
"we can talk better there."

As soon as they entered it, the Marquis threw himself into a chair, murmuring, "Oh, how tired I am !" then he offered an easy-chair to his nephew, who said to him :

"Once for all, let us understand one another. Friend or enemy ?"

"Let us make a distinction. Friend of the dear fellow before me, but a determined enemy, a sworn enemy, and a mortal enemy to his marriage."

"So Madame Corneuil was not so fortunate as to please you !" resumed Horace, in a tone of bitter irony.

"Quite the contrary," said the Marquis, suddenly becoming excited. "You did not say enough that was good about that woman. There is only one word suitable—she is adorable."

"But uncle, if that is so—"

"Adorable, I say it again ; but not at all suited to you. And, to begin with, you think you love her—you do not love her."

"Be kind enough to prove that."

"No, you do not love her. You see her through the medium of your mutual remembrances of travel, through the medium of the delight you took in explaining the tomb of Ti to her. You see her through Egypt and the Pharaohs. From the summits of the pyramids, forty

centuries have looked down upon your betrothal, and that is why your love is so dear to you. It is a pure mirage of the desert ! Leave out Egypt, leave out Ti, breathe on the rest, and nothing remains."

"If that is your only objection—"

"I have another one still. You are not of the same age."

"She is seventeen months, two weeks, and three days older than I. Is that worth talking about?"

"I hope your figures are right. I know your strict exactness in all kinds of calculation. But this woman is very mature in character, and you will be a child all your life. It might be said of you as of the Bishop of Avranches, 'When will his reverence get through his studies?' If you were in business, diplomacy, or politics, I should say, 'Marry that phoenix ; your future will be secure.' But it would be ridiculous for a perpetual scholar to marry Madame Corneuil. You flatter yourself that you are inspiring her with your own tastes and your enthusiasms, which only fill her with indulgent compassion. You bore her with your talk about Manetho ; but, as she has many talents, one of them is that of sleeping without showing it."

"Have you finished, dear uncle?"

"My sweet friend, I will spare you the rest."

"Do you think that I would take the trouble to reply?"

"I will dispense with that; I am fully convinced."

"Have you written to my mother?"

"Not yet; I do not know what to write. I am greatly embarrassed."

"If you remember, you gave me your word of honor as an uncle and a gentleman that you would do nothing without my knowledge."

"Upon my word of honor, both as uncle and as a gentleman, you may see my letters. Come again in two days, at this same hour, because I do not come in until dinner-time. I will show you my scrawls."

"Now we understand each other," answered Horace; "it is war, but an honorable war."

And he took leave of his uncle without shaking hands, so deeply did he take to heart the impertinent insinuations of Monsieur de Miraval; but on his way back he soon began to find them rather more amusing than impertinent. He ended by rehearsing them to himself laughingly, and he also laughingly repeated them to Madame Corneuil, to whom he gave a minutely faithful and exact account of his visit at the Hôtel Gibbon. His sincerity was rewarded by a most enchanting smile and many evidences of lovely and delightful tenderness. As in the arbor, a radiant brow was bent forward as if to meet his lips. It

is not true that there is no kiss like the first. The second filled Horace with such sweet intoxication that he could not work the rest of the day without abstraction. He was busy in remembering it.

His surprises were not over. Upon going the next day but one to the rendezvous appointed by his uncle, he learned that Monsieur de Miraval had left the evening before, and this time for good. No one could tell where he had gone. He had paid his bill, and left the hotel without further explanation. Did the Marquis suspect that his inconsistent and whimsical behavior was troubling greatly the heart of an adorable woman, and even disturbing her nightly repose? Madame Corneuil was again overcome by these perplexities, which told upon her disposition. Madame Véretz had hard work to defend herself, although, to tell the truth, she was not in the least to blame.

"Bah!" said Horace to them. "We distress ourselves altogether too much about all this. "What is the use of tormenting ourselves and bothering our heads about it? Let us not suspect dark mysteries where there are none at all. I had not seen my uncle before for two years. Perhaps, fresh as he seems, the approach of age may make itself felt; perhaps he may not have all his wits. He used always to know exactly what he wanted, now he knows that no longer. I am distressed about it, for I love him dearly;

and, if he is losing his mind, I freely forgive him all the outrageous things he said to me."

He did not know what to think when, at the end of a week, one morning when it was pouring hard, he saw Monsieur de Miraval enter his study, looking sober and melancholy, with clouded brow and lusterless eye.

"Where did you come from, uncle?" exclaimed he.

"Where should I come from if not from my hotel?" answered the Marquis.

"But you left it a week ago."

"I mean the Hôtel Beau-Rivage, at the borders of the lake at Ouchy, the port of Lausanne, where I settled myself, after I became dissatisfied with the Hôtel Gibbon."

"I know very well," said Horace, "that the Hôtel Beau-Rivage is at Ouchy, neither am I ignorant of the fact that Ouchy is the port of Lausanne. But I do not know why you changed your quarters without letting me know."

"Excuse me, boy—I am so busy."

"At what?"

"That is my secret."

"I am sorry for it, uncle, but your secret does not make you happy. Where is all your brilliant gayety? You seem as sober to me to-day as a prison-lock. Can you be tormented by remorse?"

"Where do you get the idea that I have remorse? This cursed rain troubles me. Look at

that lake ; it is rough and ugly. Does it always rain hereabouts ? Have you a barometer ? ”

“ Here is one at your service. Pray do you confide your secrets to my mother ? Have you in your pocket the scrawl of a letter which you were to show me ? ”

The Marquis answered neither yes nor no. He walked up and down the room, cursing the rain which prevented everything, and every now and then he returned to the barometer, which he tapped obstinately in hope that it might indicate fair weather. Then, in the midst of a lamentation he took his hat and rushed out as brusquely as he had entered, in spite of his nephew's efforts to keep him to breakfast.

The next day, being Sunday, it did not rain, thanks to Heaven, but it made up for it by blowing very hard. The lake, lashed by the breeze, was no longer itself ; it had the appearance of an angry ocean. The Marquis returned at the same hour, looking as cross and as disturbed as on the previous day, swearing against the wind as energetically as he had protested against the rain. He could talk of nothing else, and again tapped the barometer, but this time he wished to make it fall.

“ The stupid thing has gone up too high ! ” growled he.

“ It probably did not understand exactly what you wanted it to do, ” said Horace.

"I am in no mood for joking," answered he, "and am going out."

In vain Horace tried to keep him ; he reached the door and stairway, whither his nephew followed him, and then, taking his arm, said that he was determined to accompany him back to his hotel. He hoped that on his way thither he might make him talk of something besides the wind. They had not gone fifty steps when they saw a carriage coming at full speed, as if to get out of the storm, and in it were Madame Véretz and her daughter. The ladies were returning from mass at Lausanne, where it has been celebrated ever since there has been a Catholic church on the Rippone.

Just as they were about to cross, Madame Véretz, who was always on the lookout, gave an order to the coachman, and the carriage stopped short. Horace took care not to let go his uncle's arm, and obliged him to halt. Evidently the charm at once began to act again, for as he drew near the open door of the carriage, and the Marquis encountered the glances of Madame Corneuil, his countenance fell. He bowed awkwardly, muttered a few words utterly devoid of sense or any pretensions thereto, then, freeing himself from his nephew's grasp, he made another bow, and, turning his back upon them, disappeared.

"He grows more and more inexplicable," said Madame Véretz. "I begin to think his conscience troubles him."

"He is a conspirator with occasional twinges," said Madame Corneuil.

"He confessed to me yesterday that he had a secret," said Horace.

"I can guess it," resumed Madame Véretz.

"And to free my heart," answered Horace, "I am going to write to my mother this very evening."

As often happens, the wind suddenly fell during the night. In consequence, the Marquis was not to be seen the next day. Madame Véretz strove to find out about him. Perhaps she had spies in her employ, and sent them around the country. A few hours later she had the satisfaction of telling her daughter and Monsieur de Penneville that, every morning, except when it was rainy or windy, the Marquis de Miraval took the boat which crossed the lake from Ouchy to Evian, and passed the entire day in Savoy, returning at the very last moment to dine at the hotel. Now, what was his business in Savoy? They were lost in conjectures. The thing most probable upon which they settled down was that Madame de Penneville had left Vichy for Evian, and that her agent and emissary joined her every day to confer with her, and that the bomb would explode before long. Madame Véretz seriously expressed a wish, although under the form of a joke, that the Marquis should be tracked, and that Monsieur de Penneville should go to Evian the next day to

find out what was going on. Her daughter and Horace disliked the idea, and declined the proposition, one from honor, the other from prudence. Madame Corneuil, who had been timid ever since that night when she had been so disturbed by bad dreams, said to herself, "Out of sight out of mind." Not that she minded so much that for an entire day the lake would separate her and her beloved, but she was afraid lest, in the chances of this expedition, he might fall into the hands of the Philistines, who would get him away from her.

Their anxiety was soon over. Horace had written to his mother, and received from her the following reply :

"MY DEAR CHILD : Monsieur de Miraval agreed to let you know my inmost thought on the subject of the marriage which you are contemplating. Why do you speak of plotting? Your uncle wrote me, and, to prove to you how sincerely I am acting in this matter which troubles me so much, I take it upon myself to send you his letter, begging you to say nothing to him about it, for he would not easily forgive my indiscretion. You will see by this letter how little he is prejudiced against the woman whom you love, and consequently the objections which he makes to your scheme deserve to be taken into serious consideration by you. Your mother, who desires your happiness."

The letter of the Marquis ran thus :

“MY DEAR MATHILDE : I have delayed taking pen in hand, and trust you will forgive me. The case is altogether different from what I expected, and demands further reflection. I have very little hope of separating Horace from her whom I call his ‘asp of the Nile.’ I promised you that I would bring all my diplomatic talent to bear on this occasion. I was wrong to be so sure of my weapons ; what can diplomacy effect where such a woman is concerned ? You know that I came here armed with prejudices to the teeth ; you know, also, that I am somewhat a judge of both men and women, and that I do not lack quickness of perception. I have seen and I have been conquered ; I could not help saying so to Madame Corneuil herself. I will not mention to you her marvelous beauty, the grace of her wit, her literary talent, which is of the very first order, or the nobility of her sentiments. One word will suffice. You know how great was my horror of this marriage ; I entered upon a campaign of which I have a very disagreeable remembrance. For the first time—you will believe you are dreaming, my dear, and yet it is only too true—yes, if it were not for Horace, if Madame Corneuil’s heart were free, if my sixty-five years did not terrify her, yes, I would without hesitation dare to venture all, and I believe I could thus make sure of my

happiness for the few years I have yet to live. You will laugh at me, and rightly. Fortunately, Horace exists ; and, besides, be assured, I should stand no chance of being accepted. There, let us leave my little Utopia and speak of Horace. If things are so, you will say, let him marry her ! No, my dear Mathilde, I do not think it would be a happy marriage. There is a decided want of sympathy in the disposition, taste and character of these two beings ; it is impossible for me to admit that they are made for one another. I have spoken my mind freely to Horace, but there is no reasoning with a lover. You might as well play the flute to a fish. I have tried both lovers and fish unsuccessfully, and they are the hardest creatures on earth to persuade. Nevertheless, I will make one more attempt and renew the attack at the favorable moment, and you shall hear from me before long. But I must say, without reproaching you, however, that I regret bitterly ever coming to Lausanne ; you little suspect the poor service you rendered me in sending me hither, or the stormy days and troubled nights which are spent here by your old uncle, who embraces you."

Five minutes after reading this letter—that is to say, at ten o'clock in the morning—Horace, transgressing all the rules of the country, ran to the chalet, where Madame Véretz received him.

He was beside himself, and the first thing which he did was to burst out laughing.

"Hush!" said she quickly, grasping him by the arm. "Do you forget that it is against the rule to laugh here in the morning?"

Horace threw a passionate kiss in the direction of the sanctuary and said to Madame Véretz:

"Dear madame, come then as soon as you can to the garden, for absolutely I must laugh." As soon as they were in the arbor—"Oh," resumed he, "something altogether too funny has happened!"

"What has happened? What is it all about?"

"My poor, poor uncle!" and he burst out laughing again.

"Explain yourself, for pity's sake!" said Madame Véretz.

"Fancy! He is desperately in love with Hortense himself."

Madame Véretz started.

"You are telling me a most extraordinary story."

"Only listen to me, please." Thereupon he read both letters aloud, interrupting his reading at intervals to indulge freely in his gayety.

The first thing Madame Véretz did was to laugh also, the second to listen with religious attention, the third to take the letters, which Horace had just read, out of his hands, and to authenti-

cate the most interesting passages. It is well to believe only one's own eyes.

“Oh, my poor uncle!” exclaimed he. “This was your famous secret! He must have rewritten that letter ten times before sending it off; he was afraid my mother would laugh at him. Just notice the pains he has taken to make it all a joke, and yet how, in spite of himself, he betrays the seriousness of his passion. Yes, ‘his days are stormy and his nights disturbed.’ I can well conceive it. I beg you to see how everything is explained—his incoherent conduct, his blushes, his perplexity, his singular attacks of rudeness, and all his impolite behavior toward you, when he is so polite and such a slave to conventionality! He has determined not to put foot in your house again, as the butterfly resolves not to fly again into the flame of the candle. Every morning he thinks, ‘I must leave Lausanne, I will go away,’ but has not the courage to go. And, since he can not keep still, he airs his love-troubles on the lake. We wondered what he could be doing in Savoy. He goes to Meillerie to look at the rock of Saint-Preux, and rehearse his sorrows in its great shadow. Then he says to himself again, ‘I must go,’ and yet he does not go, but every day begins to make his wide and monotonous circuit round the chalet, where his heart stays fixed.”

“Yes,” said Madame Véretz; “that is it. We must believe that the planets love the sun, and yet

fear it. That is the reason why they move round it in circles."

"But, to speak the truth," answered he, resuming his serious manner, "that is not just the way astronomers explain the thing."

"Heaven help them!" said Madame Véretz.

At these words she slipped into her pocket the Marquis's letter, which Horace never thought of asking for again.

"Really," answered he, "I love and respect my uncle, and it goes against my conscience to laugh at him. But I can not pity him. He undertook a very ugly mission; and pray observe that even now he flatters himself that he may gain the case, and he still cherishes, I know not how, a faint hope. Heavens! how I long to tell the story to Hortense!"

"If you think anything of my judgment, my dear Count, you will not tell her a word of it, not a single word," answered Madame Véretz, seriously. "Let us laugh over it between ourselves like two schoolfellows, but you know Hortense does not like to laugh. She is so sensitive that that which amuses us might wound or grieve her."

"Heaven keep me from that! Still, I am sorry that you forbid it, it is such a good story!" Thereupon he left her, but, on returning to his own room, said to himself, "No matter, sooner or later, when the right moment comes, I shall speak about it to Hortense."

V.

It was near ten o'clock in the evening. The mother and daughter were alone in their *salon*. Madame Véretz was seated at her embroidery-frame, Madame Corneuil was leaning back dreamily on a lounge ; as she was not meditating, it was allowable to talk.

"Then to-morrow is the great day," said her mother to her, in lifting her head from her work.

"What do you mean ?"

"Monsieur de Penneville is to bring forth his great work. He has told me that his manuscript is seventy-three leaves long, neither more nor less ; you know how important those leaves are. We shall not get off with less than two whole hours of it by the clock. That fellow's voice is so distinct and penetrating that we can hear without listening. It fills our ears whether we wish it or not. You are fortunate, my dear : Monsieur de Miraval told the truth when he said that you have the faculty of sleeping without showing it."

"That is rather a questionable joke," answered Madame Corneuil haughtily.

"It is no crime in my eyes ; we must protect ourselves against Apepi as well as we can. Every one has his own way of getting out of the rain. Heavens ! the dear fellow may have his peculiarities, but that does not prevent him from having

a kind heart, and all that ; neither does it prevent him from being adored."

"Ah, yes, I adore him," answered Madame Corneuil sharply, "or rather, Monsieur de Penneville is inexpressibly dear to me, and I beg you never to doubt that."

Madame Véretz began to embroider again, and after a short silence said : "Good heavens ! what a pity !"

"What is the matter now ?"

"What a pity it is that the uncle is not the nephew, or the nephew the uncle !"

"What uncle are you talking about ?"

"The Marquis de Miraval."

"That conspirator ! That dreadful old man !"

"You never gave him a fair look—he is not dreadful at all. His expression is charming, his voice is fresh, his hand dimpled and well kept, just the hand of a diplomate or prelate. Do you dislike him so much ?"

"Unspeakably."

"You are unjust, very unjust ; he has a great many different kinds of merit. In the first place he is a marquis ; the other is only a count, and the streets are full of counts. Then, too, his income is not sixty thousand livres ; he has more than three times as much."

"Two hundred thousand," said Madame Corneuil. "Why do you stop there ?"

"Still another advantage ; if he chooses to

marry again, he is not obliged to endeavor to reconcile his mother to the marriage. We may try in vain. Madame de Penneville will never like us. You see that she will break with her son, and that will be a bad thing for you. The world, in such cases, always sides with the mother; and then, Monsieur de Miraval is no antiquary, but a man of the world, and, what is more, a very ambitious one. He has determined to enter political life again; before many months he will be either deputy or senator, as he chooses."

"Who told you so?"

"He himself, and he added that his only grief was that he was unmarried, for he needed a '*salon*,' and there could be no *salon* without a wife. The other only cares for grottoes, and only sighs for his dear Memphis, whither he will take you at once."

"You know well," answered she quickly, "that Horace will do exactly as I wish."

"Do not trust to that. Monsieur de Miraval says he is gentle but determined. Good heavens! what can we find to do in Egypt, we who look upon our lives as a vocation, as an apostleship? The bottom of an hypogeum is a fine place to follow a vocation in!"

"What has gone wrong with you to-night?" said Madame Corneuil, shaking her beautiful head like a bored Muse, and pouting her Juno lips like a Juno who has not yet met her Jupiter.

Madame Véretz drew her needle in and out, and hummed a tune to herself. Madame Corneuil renewed the conversation.

"I do not know what has gotten hold of you. You seem to have set to work to disgust me with my happiness. Who was it who wished for this marriage, or at least advised it?"

"Love takes the place of all else, my daughter. So regret nothing, since you love him."

"Heavens! you know very well that I have never met the man of my dreams. But I love Horace; I mean, by that, that I have liked him and still like him. But you have not told me why to-night—"

"Good!" thought Madame Véretz, "we have got over adoration," and she resumed aloud: "My beautiful one, Monsieur de Penneville is a splendid *parti*, I do not contradict that, and I recommended him because I had nothing better to offer."

"While to-night—?"

"Ah, to-night I know of another one."

Madame Véretz rose from her chair, and, after rummaging in her pocket, drew near her daughter, and said to her:

"Read these two letters; I do not give them to you, I only lend them, for Monsieur de Penneville noticed that I kept them, and I must send them back to him to-morrow morning."

Madame Corneuil cast her eyes disdainfully

over the first of the two letters ; but, when she began the second, she changed her position, roused herself from her languor, her pale cheek was suffused with color, and something could be read in her eyes which her long eyelashes did not strive to conceal.

And yet, when she had finished reading, she rose, took an envelope from a drawer, inclosed both letters in it, begged her mother to direct it, rang for Jacquot, and said to him :

“Take this packet to the Count de Penneville immediately !” after which she sank back on the lounge again.

“Did those scraps of paper burn your fingers ?” said Madame Véretz, with a smile.

“You should have spared me the trouble of reading such rubbish,” answered she.

“Rubbish, my dear ? What would the Marquis say if he heard that ? The poor man is dreadfully excited ! It is his own fault : why did he come near a beautiful pair of eyes which are accustomed to work such miracles ?”

“Not another word,” rejoined the daughter. “You know I can not endure that sort of jesting.”

Madame Véretz returned to her embroidery. Madame Corneuil rose, and walked up and down the room restlessly and excitedly. Then she seated herself at the piano, and sighed forth in an agitated, passionate voice that song of Mi-

gnon's which Horace liked so well. She stopped in the middle of the last verse, and, turning toward her mother, said :

"No, I do not understand you. Is it possible that you can seriously propose to me that I should give up a man who is full of good qualities, a man worthy of my esteem, and personally attractive also ?"

"The other morning, when he laughed so, he looked like a splendid sheep who had learned Coptic," interrupted Madame Véretz.

"A man who has my word," resumed she. "You dread scandal ; I think, then, there would be something to criticise."

"It is only necessary to take proper precautions. We need not leave him—he can leave us."

"And for whom would I sacrifice him ? for a man of seventy ?"

"Ah, pardon—the Marquis is only sixty-five, and he does not look that. He has had a splendid past, and still will have a pleasant future. I predict a great success for him in the tribune, one of those successes which is rewarded with a ministry. France is so poor in men ! and then, my dear idol, you had better believe that only old men know how to love ! They are so pleased that they are tolerated ; I will add also that Monsieur de Miraval has fine taste—he appreciates our writing. He stamps it 'of the highest order.'"

Thereupon Madame Véretz left her work again,

rushed at her daughter, and, pressing her in her arms, said :

“Are you vexed ? Then we will say no more about it. Monsieur de Penneville and his uncle are totally unlike. You like one—”

“You never get the right word—I do not dislike him.”

“And you do dislike the other ?”

“Heavens ! I did dislike him.”

“Well, now they are both on the same footing, on the same level. The lists are open.”

“You are quite right ; you will end in offending me in good earnest,” answered Madame Corneuil, lighting a candle to retire to her room.

As she was going out she drew near the window, and for a moment gazed upon the starry vault as if to seek an inspiration therefrom. Then, turning to her mother, she said, resolutely and solemnly :

“Be sure that I shall consult my heart alone. If you misapprehend my sentiments, I shall reserve the right to disclaim them.”

Madame Véretz kissed her once more, saying :

“You are just like the King of Prussia ; you talk about your heart and your conscience, and let things take their own course, merely reserving the right to disclaim your responsibility. Well, then, I will be your Bismarck.”

And so saying she accompanied her adorable angel to the door of her sacred retreat.

The next day a fine rain fell in the early morning, notwithstanding which the Marquis did not visit his nephew, which disappointed Madame Véretz exceedingly ; perhaps she had intended to stop him by the way and take possession of him. In the afternoon the weather cleared up, and she proposed to her daughter to take a drive. Horace did not go with them ; he depended upon going over his manuscript again, that there need be no impediment in his reading this evening ; he felt that it could never be good enough.

As the ladies were returning from their drive along the beautiful esplanade of Montbennon, which commands a wonderful view of the lake and of the Alps, Madame Véretz, whose eyes ferreted out everything, perceived the Marquis seated in a melancholy attitude upon a solitary bench. She descended quickly from the carriage, begging her daughter to return alone. A few minutes after, with seeming carelessness, she passed before the Marquis at a distance of about ten steps, and uttered a little scream of joyful surprise. Monsieur de Miraval saw a chignon of most beautiful red come between him and the Alps ; he would have preferred it to have been blonde, but made the best of it.

“Thanks be to this good chance !” exclaimed Madame Véretz. “You are my prisoner, Monsieur le Marquis, and must surrender at discretion.”

He offered her his arm, saying to her :

"I am much pleased with my jailer, dear madame."

"I will excuse you from being gallant," answered she. "I only wish you to speak to me openly, if that can ever be asked of a diplomat. Will you be sincere?"

"I will be as sincere as Amen-heb, surnamed the truth-telling keeper of the flocks of Ammon."

"You must at once acknowledge that I have the right to question you. Has not your conduct toward us been most peculiar? Since the day Monsieur de Penneville introduced you, you have taken every pains to avoid us."

"Believe me, madame—"

"Really, what harm could we have done to you? You certainly must have discovered that I was a fool."

"Dear madame, from the first moment when I had the honor of meeting you, I have considered you a woman of great talent."

"If that be so, can it be my daughter who has the misfortune to displease you?"

"Your daughter!" exclaimed the Marquis, "Could I be so cursed by God and man! Why, your daughter is adorable."

"The very words of the letter," thought Madame Véretz; "he is right in sticking to it." Then she resumed: "Monsieur le Marquis, what means all this mystery, then?"

“Ah ! madame,” said he to her, looking slyly at her, “you are a very clever woman, and you live with those who can decipher hieroglyphics. I am afraid you may have divined me.”

“You exaggerate my clairvoyance. I have divined nothing whatever. Is it true, as Monsieur de Penneville pretends, that you have a secret ?”

“Can my nephew accidentally have discovered that secret ? You alarm me ; he is the last man in the world to whom I would make my confession.”

“I can easily believe that,” thought she ; “we have the hare by the ears now.”

Gently pressing the Marquis’s arm, she said to him : “Indeed, I do not understand you at all, and I like nothing better than making out people. Will you not reveal this dreadful secret to me ?”

“Never, madame, never. I have not yet lost all respect for my white hairs ; I stand in awe of them ; should you want me to cover them with everlasting ridicule ?”

“You are the only one that sees that they are white,” said she, with a most encouraging glance.

“And then,” resumed he, “you would betray me to Horace. For the first time an uncle trembles before his nephew.”

“I shall have to give it up,” thought Madame Véretz, a little angry ; “his white hairs and his

nephew are a restraint upon him. He will not speak until the other has left the place."

After a pause she resumed : "Monsieur le Marquis, if you had been less stingy of your visits you would have both honored and delighted us, for I longed to see you, and talk with you about something which troubles me. I have my secret as well, and I longed to confide it to you. Yes, for several days I have been very much disturbed. Monsieur de Penneville, who has the unfortunate habit of telling everything—"

"Very unfortunate indeed, madame ; I have often reproved him for it."

"Without curing him of it, however," pursued she, "since he repeated to us a conversation which he had had with you, without keeping back any of the objections which occurred to you on the subject of his marriage."

"I recognize him there, the wretch !" said the Marquis.

"It has given me a great deal to think of, and I am forced to respect your excellent reason. I am greatly to blame, for I have been cruelly mistaken. There is not between those young people that harmony of character and of taste which is the first condition of happiness."

"How pleased I am to hear you speak thus !" exclaimed he. "The great point is harmony of tastes ; neither is that enough. According to the ideas of Providence and also of my own, mar-

riage should be a mutual admiration society. Now, I have become acquainted with—yes, dear madame, I am acquainted with a woman of most uncommon merit. She has published admirable sonnets, which Petrarch might envy her if he were still alive, and a treatise on the duties and virtues of woman, which Fénelon would have consented to sign if Bossuet would not have disputed the honor with him. Are you listening? She lent those precious volumes to a man who pretends to be in love with her; the unfortunate fellow could not read them through. I have seen both volumes: one is only cut through the first half, the other is still untouched, absolutely uncut. The best part of the whole thing is, that the poor fellow fancies he has read them, and is ready to swear that he admires them. But don't repeat my story to Madame Corneuil."

"As for Madame Corneuil," answered she with a smile, "she will undoubtedly publish at some future day a book on the duties of mothers, and I am sure she will number indiscretion among their virtues. Alas! mothers are often considered indiscreet, and the story you have just related is well suited to enlighten my daughter upon her own feelings and those which Horace pretends to have toward her. Besides, I ought to confess to you that she herself—"

"Speak, madame, speak; you ought, you say, to confess to me that she herself—"

“Oh ! my daughter has so profound a soul that she keeps her feelings to herself. But for a long time I have observed that she is thoughtful, serious, almost sad, and I ask myself if she, too, may not have reflected.”

The Marquis let go the arm of Madame Véretz that he might wipe his forehead with his handkerchief. There is such a thing in the world as perspiration caused by delight.

“Ah ! you are glad, old fellow !” said Madame Véretz within herself. “You have forgotten your white hairs. Let us see if you are going to speak.”

The Marquis did not speak. It might have been said that his joy was so great as to make him forget where he was and with whom. Nevertheless, he finally remembered ; and, seizing the hand of Madame Véretz, he lifted it almost lovingly to his lips, so that she was afraid he had misunderstood.

“Dear madame,” said he, “all men who meddle with literature have a passion which is stronger and more enduring than love, and that is self-love, and to kill out the lover it is sometimes only necessary to scratch the author with the prick of a pin.”

“We were made to talk together,” said she to him ; “we understand each other with half a word. But, I beg you, Monsieur le Marquis, if the scratch of a pin does have such a wonderful effect, will you tell me your secret ?”

“No, madame, but I will write it to you.”

“That is a thing agreed upon,” answered she, giving him her hand, which he pressed convulsively in his gratitude.

After which she turned toward the *pension* Vallaud, saying to herself, “That is the ideal son-in-law of my dreams.”

VI.

HORACE had been reading full twenty minutes. They were listening or pretending to listen to him. The pretty *salon* of the chalet was situated on the ground-floor, and, as the evening was warm, the window had been left open. Had there been passers-by, the sound of their footsteps might have disturbed him; but, thanks to Heaven, there were no passers-by. Jacquot and his trumpet had retired to his attic, and were peacefully sleeping in each other's arms. The birds in the park had agreed to keep silence, that they might hear better, without losing a word; it is true that the season had come when they had ceased to sing. From the bosom of their ethereal abodes, the stars, those dwellers in eternal silence, cast a friendly glance upon him. He read with dignity, with zeal, and with conviction, but also modestly. Now and then he stopped to say: “Do you think I am going too fast? When I was a child they used to reprove me for sputtering. Is it hard for you to follow me? Do you wish me to begin

over again? You are going to ask for the proofs; wait, I will give them further on. If you have any observations to make, do not hesitate, I shall be much obliged to you for them." But they took very good care not to make any observation, and no one implored him to begin again.

We said before that he had the precious faculty of combining sensations, by which he could enjoy several things at the same time, and all these different pleasures combined to make but one. The exquisite scent of jasmine in bloom came into the parlor through the half-open window. He breathed in the perfume with delight, and, although he was absorbed in his reading, he now and then looked out at the stars, and thought of those beautiful brown eyes shot with fawn-color, which were lovelier to look upon than all the stars of heaven. He could not see those beautiful eyes, for Madame Corneuil was seated upon a luxurious divan in the background, where the glare of the lamp could not reach her. Reclining and silent, she was all ears, for darkness is favorable to attention. I can not swear that her thoughts did not occasionally wander. She might have been thinking of the two uncut volumes. Madame Véretz was seated at her frame, opposite the reader, and, as she embroidered, made little approving nods to him. Her smile and the sparkle of her green eyes also expressed sufficiently the lively interest which she took in the Hyksos, un-

less that smile meant simply to say, "Heaven be praised, my dear sir—habit makes anything tolerable!"

He continued to read, turning over the leaves regretfully, for he felt so happy that he wished that both his happiness and his reading might never come to an end. Before he began, a delicate hand, which he would have liked to hold for ever in his own, had placed before him a large glass of sweetened water. He moistened his lips with it, hemmed to clear his voice, and then resumed in these words :

"We have demonstrated that the history of Joseph, son of Jacob, as contained in the thirty-fourth chapter of Genesis and those following, bears the evident stamp of authenticity. The proper names, of so great importance in such cases, also bear further evidence. As every one knows, the officer of Pharaoh, chief of his guards or of his eunuchs, who bought Joseph from the Ishmaelites, and with whose wife he had that unfortunate adventure, from which he could only escape by leaving his cloak behind him, was called Potiphar, and Potiphar is nothing if not Pet-Phra, which signifies consecrated to Ra, or to the sun-god. Joseph received from Pharaoh the title of Zphanatpaneach, which must be translated into Zpent-Pouch ; now, Zpent-Pouch means the creator of life, which proves sufficiently the gratitude which the Egyptians bore to Joseph for having

provided for their sustenance during the famine. The daughter of a priest of On, or Annu, was given him in marriage."

Here he turned to Madame Véretz: "Is there any necessity of my explaining to you that On, or Annu, means the city of the sun, or Heliopolis?"

"Would you insult me so cruelly?" answered she.

"Then they bestowed upon him the daughter of a priest of On, or Annu, who was called As-nath, a name which can be explained as As-Neith, thus signifying that she was consecrated to the mother of the sun. After this only one thing remains to be proved to make us sure that the Pharaoh under whose reign Joseph came into Egypt was indeed the Shepherd King Apepi."

"Here we are at last!" exclaimed Madame Véretz joyfully. "I always loved that Apepi without knowing him."

"Oh, I do not pretend to rank him too highly," answered he, "and I should not dare to affirm even that he was a person to be loved; but he was a man of merit, and you will see that he was in some measure worthy of the consideration which you wish to bestow upon him. Neither can I say that he was handsome, although there was character in his face. Do you ask how I know this? In the Museum of the Louvre, madame, in Cabinet A of the Historical Museum, there is a figure of green basalt, somewhat defaced, in which some pretend

to recognize the best Saïte manner. Unfortunately, the tablets bearing the inscriptions have disappeared. Madame, I have the strongest reasons for believing that this precious statuette is not Saïte at all, but the portrait of one of the Shepherd kings, and that this Shepherd king is Apepi. So you perceive—" He lifted the glass to his lips again and took a second swallow methodically, as he did everything; then pursued his reading:

"For this purpose we are obliged to go further back. It was toward the end of the year 1830 before the Christian era that the sovereigns of the dynasty of Thebes began to rise against the Hyksos. After a long and painful struggle, in which they underwent every change of fortune, they drove the Shepherds into Lower Egypt. More than a century after, the king Raskenen was seated upon the throne of Thebes; he is mentioned in a papyrus at the British Museum, the importance of which no one can fail to estimate. It happened, so it is written in this papyrus, that the land of Egypt fell into the hands of wicked rulers, and at that time there was not a king who was possessed of strength, health, or life. But behold! the king Raskenen appeared, full of life, health, and strength, and he reigned over the region of the south. The wicked had possession of the fortress of the sun, and the entire country was subject to their impositions and taxes. The king

of the wicked ones was called Apepi, and he chose for his lord," so says the papyrus, "the god Sutech, that is to say, the god Set, who is no other than the Greek god Typhon, genius of evil."

"It is true," interrupted Madame V éretz, "that Sutech, Set, and Typhon, upon close examination, do resemble each other strongly."

"O madame—please!" said he to her; "we are just coming to the principal point."

And he resumed: "He erected in his honor a temple of solid masonry, and served none other of the gods of Egypt. So the papyrus teaches; and this important document proves: 1. That the Shepherd kings had taken up their abode in the Delta; 2. That they had all Lower Egypt under their domination; 3. That Apepi—"

Just then it occurred to him that it was long since he had heard the adored voice, that voice which sang Mignon's song to him so well; so, turning toward the divan, he said:

"He was also called Apophis, but Apepi is his real name. Which of the two do you prefer, Hortense?"

Hortense made no response; perhaps her emotion at the narration had taken away her power of speech.

"Apophis or Apepi!" screamed Madame V éretz to her—"choose boldly. Monsieur de Penneville leaves it to your decision."

Alas! she made no reply.

Horace started, he felt a chill run through all his frame, like a premonition of destiny. He rose, seized a light, walked hastily toward the divan. It was only too true, he could doubt it no longer—Madame Corneuil was asleep !

A little more, and he would have let fall from his hands the lamp which had thrown so much light upon his disaster. He placed it upon a stand.

“Heavens ! how she sleeps !” exclaimed Madame Véretz. “Are you not something of a magnetizer ?” She moved toward her daughter as if to awaken her. He drew her back, saying with a bitter sneer :

“Oh, respect her repose, I implore you !”

It would be wrong to believe that the self-love of both author and reader did not suffer greatly. Light broke in upon him : she suddenly came to understand that for several months he had either deceived himself or allowed himself to be deceived. Perfectly motionless, with cool, fixed, and piercing eye, he gazed upon the face of the beautiful sleeper, whose pose was charming, for she knew well how to sleep. Nothing could have been lovelier than the disarray of her beautiful hair, one curl of which fell on her cheek. Her lips were parted in a half smile ; probably she was dreaming sweetly, she had sought refuge in a land where there was no Apepi.

Horace continued to gaze at her, and I know

not what scales fell one by one from his eyes. Charming as she was, he saw her graces disappear every moment, and was on the point of thinking her plain. In truth, he recognized her no longer. The miracle which took place at Sak-karah, on coming out of the tomb of Ti, had been undone ; the connection between the sleeper and Egypt was at an end. On leaving Cairo she had borne away in her golden hair, in her smile, and in her eyes, some of the sunshine which ripens the dates, and delights the heart of the lotus, and cheers the yellow sand of the desert with mirages, and from which the history of the Pharaohs can not hide its secrets. The aureole with which it had crowned her brow was extinguished in a moment, and he also perceived that her eyelashes were too long, her lips too thin, and her arms, which were softly rounded, ended in clutching hands, with claws beneath them ; that there were little lines round her brow and mouth, and these coming wrinkles, which he had never before observed, betrayed to him the base workings of sordid passions—that restlessness of vanity which makes women old before their time. Whence came this sudden clairvoyance ? He was angry, and, say what they may, intense anger is luminous.

“You must forgive her,” said Madame Véretz ; “I have been watching her narrowly from the corner of my eye ; she struggled bravely : unfortunately, her nerves are not as strong as mine.

You have already put her to severe tests ; she bore them honorably, but how can one hold out longer against that most dreadful of all bores, the Pharaonic bore ? Be careful, my dear count, she has so much esteem and friendship for you ; sometimes it only takes a very little whim to weary a woman's heart."

She pointed alternately to the closed eyes of her daughter and the seventy-three leaves.

"My dear count, you must choose between this and that."

As he listened, he took note of her with his haggard gaze, and her red hair filled him with horror.

"Really, madame," said he to her, "it seems as if I were just beginning to know you."

At these words he turned toward the table, gathered up his papers, put them into his portfolio, put the portfolio under his arm, made a low bow, and escaped.

"You can wake up, my dear," said Madame Véretz, laughing ; "we are for ever delivered from the King Apepi, who lived forty centuries before Christ."

A head appeared above the window-sill, and a voice exclaimed from without :

"Add sixteen to that, madame. It is best always to be exact."

The Count de Penneville went back to his room with death in his soul. That which he so

bitterly regretted was less a woman than a dream. For long months a vision had been the delicious companion of his days ; she had never left him ; she was interested in everything that he did ; she ate and drank with him, she worked with him, and dreamed with him. She spoke to him, and he answered, and they understood one another before the words were spoken. Her voice melted his heart. She had golden hair, which had one day touched his cheek ; she had lips, too, which his own had touched twice. As he went on thinking, his anger made him forget his grief ; the poor fellow would have given a great deal to have his two kisses back again.

And yet he still had a faint hope. "No, it can not be ; such things do not happen," thought he. "She could not have let me leave her thus for ever. She will call me back ; she is busy in writing to me now. Jacquot will come before midnight, bringing me a note which will explain all." No Jacquot came, and soon a neighboring clock struck midnight. Its melancholy stroke resembled a funeral-toll. The clock mourned for some one who had just died, and Horace realized that his dear companion, his vision, was no longer in the world. Henceforth he would be alone, utterly alone, and his solitude filled him with dread. His head fell upon his breast, and great tears rolled down his cheeks.

When he lifted his head he saw he was not

alone ; that on his table before him stood a little statuette a foot high, looking at him. Her name was Sekhet, the helper, and she stretched toward him her pretty little catlike face full of pitying kindness. He ran to her, and took her in his hands. "Ah !" said he, "you are here ; how could I have forgotten you ? I am not alone if you remain to me. Some one said on this very spot that roses would fade, but the gods remained." As he spoke thus he caressed her slender figure and her rounded thighs, and ended by kissing her devotedly on the forehead. It seemed to him as if the good little Sekhet really pitied his sorrows, and was moved and touched by them ; that she had a kind little heart, like one of the gray nuns, or simply like a good, honest human being. It seemed to him also that there were tears in her eyes, goddess as she was, and that she returned his kiss, although she was nothing but a bit of blue porcelain. It seemed as if she said to him, "You have come back to me, and I will never lend you to any one again." And yet, good Heavens ! she had lent so little of him.

He felt comforted, as if he had purified both heart and lips. He stood before the glass, and gazed upon himself. He saw that Count Horace's eyes were somewhat red, but, notwithstanding that, he saw that Count Horace was still a man. He went in search of two large empty trunks

which he had put aside in an outer closet ; he dragged one after the other into his chamber ; two minutes later he began to pack them.

On the next afternoon the Marquis de Miraval, who strangely enough had omitted that day to cross the lake, although the weather was really beautiful, received two letters, one of which was brought by the postman, the other by Jacquot, in a new suit of clothes.

The first, written in fine and steady handwriting, was expressed in the following manner :

“MY DEAR UNCLE : The situation is vacant and at your service. If you have any commands for Vichy, please forward them to Geneva, where I shall pass to-night, and leave to-morrow by the express-train, which goes at three o'clock, or, to speak more correctly, at twenty-five minutes past three. Allow me to convey to you my best wish for your happiness, and the assurance of my unchanging affection.”

The second, hurriedly scribbled, contained these words :

“MONSIEUR LE MARQUIS : Unfortunately you spoke the truth. He either did not love at all or else very lightly, since he can not forgive the woman whom he pretended to love for having

dozed during the reading of his paper upon the King Apepi. I will leave you to imagine what my daughter thinks of it all ; she has taken the full measure of the man, and a woman no longer loves the man whom she thus measures. I have heard that he left immediately, so you need fear my imprudence no longer. Nothing henceforth can hinder you from revealing to me your secret, or rather, do better still, come and tell it to us to-night and dine with us."

Jacquot carried back the following answer to Madame Véretz :

"DEAR MADAME : So I must reveal to you my dreadful secret ! I have an unfortunate passion which I conceal carefully out of respect for my white hairs. Those of my friends who know it have mercilessly made fun of me. With blushes I confess it to you, I dote on fishing ! When Madame de Penneville sent me to Lausanne to manage a family affair, I consoled myself for my inconvenience by remembering that Lausanne was near a lake, where I might fish. My first thought on arriving was to buy fishing-lines and all the other necessary apparatus. I did not dare to fish in your neighborhood for fear I might be surprised, and that my nephew would laugh at me. I made inquiries, and was told that there was a pretty little place near Evian, in Savoy, full

of fish. There is an inn on the shore, so I engaged a room there, where I kept all my equipments, and every morning I crossed the lake to satisfy my passion. Since I promised you that I would be as truth-telling as Amen-heb (chief scribe), I will show you how far I was carried away by this mania. I left Lausanne for Ouchy with the sole intention of getting near fish ; I forgot so entirely the business which brought me here that I only went to see my nephew twice—one day when it blew, and another when it rained, because there was no fishing on those days. I also declined two most attractive invitations to breakfast, because if I had accepted them I should have given up the pleasure of fishing for two whole days. The lamentable part of it is, that, in spite of my pains, my application, and perseverance, I caught nothing but a few miserable gudgeons. I kept saying to myself : ‘This is too much ; I will leave it all.’ But I did not leave it. When I returned to Lausanne, my faith in fish would return, but I believe in them no longer. Thus our illusions vanish like our youth ; our path is strewn with them. Nevertheless, yesterday, by some incomprehensible miracle, I did succeed in catching a good-sized eel, who kindly condescended to take my bait—so on that I leave. The honor of my white hairs is secure.

“I beg you, dear madame, to present to your adorable daughter, and also accept for yourself,

the most devoted and respectful compliments of the Marquis de Miraval."

We will not attempt to describe the expression which came over the face of Madame Véretz as she took in the full meaning of this reply, the cruel embarrassment which she experienced in communicating it to her daughter, or the terrible scene which that adored angel made for her. Madame Corneuil is less to be pitied than her mother, since, in her misfortune, she at least has one resource, that of relieving her mind by the most vehement reproaches, the most violent recriminations, and exclamations like "Are you not to blame for all this?" It is related that in this century lived a queen who was very intelligent, very enlightened, full of good sentiments, who exercised a great and rightful influence in affairs of state. It happened, unfortunately, that she was once mistaken, and the fate of a lifetime is sometimes settled in a minute. From that moment she was no longer consulted. The people she recommended were no longer accepted; her august husband said, "I suspect them all—they are the friends of my wife." So, once having been mistaken, Madame Véretz lost all her influence, all her credit. Her daughter will remind her to all eternity that she once allowed her to let go her prey, to chase a phantom with white hair.

When the Count Horace de Penneville entered the station at Geneva, impatient to go by the train which leaves not at three o'clock, but at twenty-five minutes past three, in the afternoon, he was greatly astonished to find, seated in a corner of the very carriage which he happened to enter, the Marquis de Miraval, his great-uncle, who remarked to him, as he helped him to stow away carefully all his numberless little parcels under the seat and upon the rack, "My son, I have thought the matter well over, and have come to the conclusion that there is no faith to be put in women who like Apepi one day and dislike him the next."

THE END.

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